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VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1995

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Stories set high standard

Dear Editor:

I just finished reading the first issue of Parsec and all I can say is "wow."

I can't believe that it has taken so long for a magazine like Parsec to become a reality in Canada.

Your articles of Rick Stevenson and Garrett Wang were well done and worth the cover price. Both articles were comprehensive and enjoyable. I hope that future articles in Parsec will meet the standards these two have set.

Best of luck to you and keep up the good work.

Ian McWhirter
Vancouver

P.S. How about a Forever Knight story in the future?

Thanks for the kind words Ian, it feels great to have reached so many science fiction and fantasy fans across Canada. In regards to your request for a Forever Knight story, is next issue soon enough for you?

— Chris

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Sharing a vision

I'm a little leery about writing this column.

During the past few days, I have become all too aware of how some people hear only what they want to hear or read only half of what is on the page.

At the time of this writing, I have only recently returned from the ninth annual Toronto Trek convention. Make no mistake about it, the convention was a great way to spend three days — OK so the after effects of some vile concoction called "Odo Doesn't Live Here Anymore" took some of the thrill out of one day. Making the event even more enjoyable for the crew here at Parsec was the fact that our first issue was officially launched at the event.

And judging by the reaction from people purchasing issues and subscriptions, we were a smash (thank you).

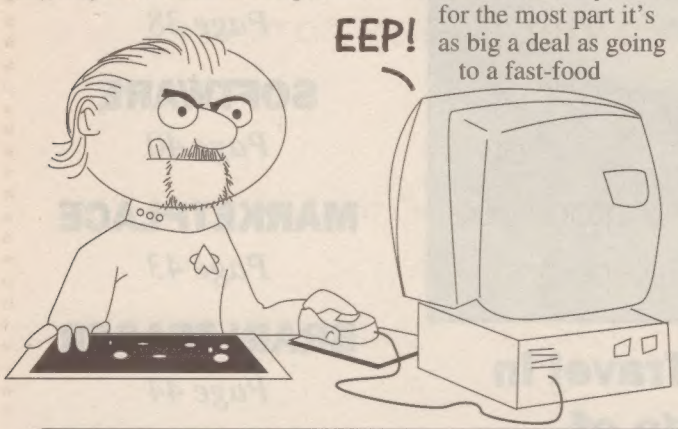
But there were two instances, when readers dropped by the table and criticized us for saying something about our magazine that wasn't quite true — that we were Canada's only science fiction magazine. A quick turn to the page in question revealed that they hadn't made it all the way to the end of the sentence (the part incidentally that mentioned the other publications that are produced in Canada, and noted the differences between us and them).

So I hope you read all the sentences from this point on.

The germ of this column came during a lull in the action in the dealer's room. I began to think about the differences between the Toronto Trek and the other conventions that Sherri, John and I had attended during the time leading up to the publication of our first issue.

Fan-run conventions are much more enjoyable than those run by professional convention organizers.

For some reason, there seems to be a cattle-car approach to the latter. People come, they see the guest and then leave. They may linger or watch a blooper reel or some such activity, but for the most part it's as big a deal as going to a fast-food restaurant. This is one reason why Parsec will not list conventions operated by companies on a for-profit basis unless they purchase an advertisement. After all, they're a business and so are we.



At the fan-run conventions, there is an entirely different atmosphere.

The people there share something, something that makes for some interesting chats in the hallway or over the dealer's table.

Here, these people don't so much share a common interest as they do a vision.

Majel Barrett Roddenberry once noted that this is what makes these gatherings so special, that many of the people there share her husband's dream.

And if you ask many of the people attending these conventions why they're dressed as Odo or a Klingon warrior, some will tell you because it's fun, but others will tell you that they do indeed share Gene Roddenberry's vision.

On the surface, that is quite a flattering statement. However, there is a difference between sharing this vision and actually doing something to make it become a reality.

And this brings us to the crux of the matter.

As I watched the Star Trek fans walk past the Parsec table at Toronto Trek, I wondered how many of them (1) knew what Gene Roddenberry's vision was, (2) believed in this vision and (3) acted to make it become a reality.

Actually following through and making some portion of Gene Roddenberry's vision come to pass is the greatest legacy that the man could have.

This doesn't necessarily mean that you must perform some grandiose act, merely some small act that betters someone else's life or the quality of life around you.

It really isn't that hard to do, but I really wonder how many of those fans who said they believe in Gene Roddenberry's vision have actually put this belief into practice.

To those who have, you have my admiration.

The reason that I had some trepidation about writing this column is that some will misconstrue my argument as a slight against Star Trek or its fans.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. Like many others, I am a fan of Star Trek or at least some of the writing that goes into it.

I merely point out that there are different levels of belief. And those who merely nod and voice platitudes regarding Gene Roddenberry's vision of the future actually do it a disservice, and those who attempt to put it into practice and actually make it part of their lives give it the highest compliment possible.

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PARSEC LETTERS

First issue covered all bases

Dear Editor:

Great magazine.

I really enjoyed the diversified content. You seem to be covering all the bases of the arts.

I liked the article on Terry (Pallot), but then I know him.

Keep up the job you're doing.

Dennis Whitman
Worthington, Ontario

A few other comments

Congratulations on your premier issue. Well done! This should be a boost to sci-fi and fantasy writers in Canada.

Rick Zablocki
Chatsworth, Ontario

Love the magazine, the way it is. Don't change a thing.

R.J. O'Dell
Montreal

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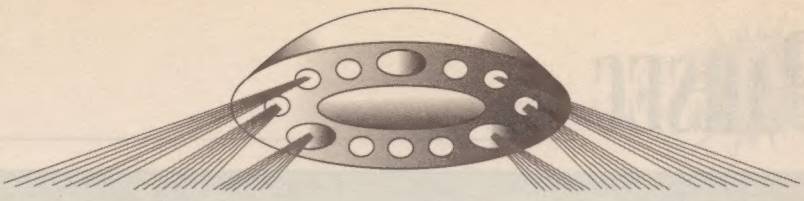

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TEK EFFECT

Photo courtesy Atlantis Films

By
KENNEDY GORDON

Captain Kirk's chair doesn't look like it would fit in on the desk of any version of the U.S.S. Enterprise.

The pink office chair is loaded with all the gadgets that make for a comfortable sitting experience, but is devoid of any of the doodads that adorn the command chair of the Star Trek flagship. No communications console, no command override, no computer readout; what's a ship's captain to do?

Well, it's not on a starship.

The chair is behind a simple desk in William Shatner's office at C.O.R.E. Digital Pictures.

The Canadian-born actor, legendary for his role as Kirk in the landmark science fiction series, isn't in today. But it's still his chair, and it inspires a bit of wonder.

The Church of Righteous Effects is located in an unassuming brick building in downtown Toronto.

The walls are bright yellow, there's no stained glass in the place, and the only thing even remotely resembling an altar is the digital editing unit set up amongst the dozen or so computer stations in the in-house studio.

C.O.R.E. Digital Pictures, one of Canada's foremost computer-generated special effects operations, occupies a relatively small space. A lot of room isn't necessary, of course; most of the work is done on computers and therefore in the vast intangibility of cyberspace. Besides the main studio, C.O.R.E. features a couple of offices for the partners, a board room, and a large office for the company's official face: William Shatner.

The captain has the corner office, of course. And there's not a computer to be seen.

But computers play the key role in C.O.R.E.'s operations.

That doesn't mean this is an office filled with techies pounding out images without any talent, though.

"The way we look at it the computer is basically a tool like anything else is," says the calm and measured John Mariela, one of C.O.R.E.'s founding partners.

"I think it's harder for someone to become an effects person without having the visual acuity first. You can be as fully versed in computers as you want, but without the eye for what looks right or not you're not going to go far."

The fact that C.O.R.E.'s designers aren't from computer backgrounds strongly illustrates that point.

"A few of us here have graduated from traditional art

Photo courtesy Atlantis Films

Special effects like the ones produced by C.O.R.E. Digital of Toronto, were the trademark of the TekWar movies and series. While TekWar is no more, C.O.R.E. Digital has moved on to other projects.

background through university and acquired the computer knowhow after the fact,'' Mariela says.

"A couple of us have gone through film school and again acquired the computer skills later. Another is a traditional animator, so working here is about mainly relying on the visual arts skills first and the computer skills second.''

C.O.R.E. came into being when partners Kyle Menzies, Bob Munroe and Derek Grime found themselves thrown together to work on TekWar, Shatner's CTV/USA Network science fiction series based on his books.

"Three of the four founders of the company were working on TekWar movies-of-the-week for a year,'' Mariela explains.

"So those three guys, Bob, Derek and Kyle were brought together from various studios around the city to work together under one roof. TekWar had all the equipment, but needed the talent to operate the stuff.''

> "They're kind of black comedy sci-fi movies set in a parallel universe. It's about these ex-cons who escape from death row and steal the ruler of the universe's mother ship. And they go off to have fun in space."

It wasn't long before the group had christened itself the Department of Righteous Effects. Soon, though, work was done on the first four movies and the series hadn't yet begun production. The three FX wizards brought commercial producer Mariela on board, and C.O.R.E. was born.

There was one ingredient missing, though: a name and face to go with the company. Enter Shatner.

"That was tied in to the TekWar thing, TekWar being his series while he was here in Toronto and TekWar being the reason this whole department got started,'' says Mariela.

"We approached him about the idea of starting a company and asked him if he wouldn't mind being our figurehead. He liked the idea — thought it was a great idea, actually — and he wanted to be involved.''

That was in April of 1994. Since then, C.O.R.E. has quickly become perhaps Canada's best-known computer effects studio, with plenty of projects on the go and more to come.

Shatner's role seems to fall mainly on the promotional side, but he's taken an active interest in C.O.R.E. and will work even closer with the studio on some of his upcoming productions.

"Basically when we need his involvement for any particular thing we go search him out,'' says Mariela. "And now he's got a script he's written for a feature that we're working with him on. We're looking forward to that.''

That's just one upcoming project.

TekWar has wrapped production, and the C.O.R.E. boys have readily moved on. After contributing effects to the new series The Outer Limits and to the Toronto-lensed Keanu Reeves film Johnny Mnemonic, C.O.R.E. is working on geese-in-flight effects for an upcoming (and untitled) film about a man training geese to fly, and the effects for a new German-Canadian co-production called

The heart of C.O.R.E. Digital, left to right, Derek Grime, John Mariela, Kyle Menzies and Bob Munroe.

Photo by JEL

The Dark Zone.

Working on Dark Zone means C.O.R.E. will open a German studio and expand its Toronto operation, which currently employs about 14 people.

"We're just in the process of staffing up for the dark zone project, a series of movies-of-the-week," says Mariela.

"They're kind of black comedy sci-fi movies set in a parallel universe. It's about these ex-cons who escape from death row and steal the ruler of the universe's mother ship. And they go off to have fun in space."

Unlike other shows that use computer-generated graphics (like Babylon 5 and SeaQuest DSV), Dark Zone will make use of fully-integrated FX. As Mariela explains, human actors will interact with characters and scenes that will be added later.

Unlike the recent film Casper, though, the computerized images will seem wholly realistic.

"The majority of the stuff is going to be a combination of live action with computer graphics, very much unlike Babylon 5, where they only do cutaways to the CG (computer-generated) stuff. We'll have backgrounds the characters are dealing with, creatures in the scenes. It's going to be very impressive."

This style of production, though, means C.O.R.E. will be involved with the series from pre-production on, rather than adding images after the live sequences have been shot.

The Dark Zone should make it to air sometime next year.

Derek Grime says he's probably the one guy at C.O.R.E. who's not taking a big role in Dark Zone. Grime, a fast-talking character with a Lost in Space T-shirt and an Etch-A-Sketch watch, is a partner in C.O.R.E., and says he's the unofficial animation director.

Just back from the Siggraph computer animation convention in Los Angeles, Grime is still buzzing about the 50,000 animators gathered to talk turkey about computer-generated FX.

"Where else can you find a room filled with thousands of people getting excited because some guy got a sleeve to fold correctly?" he asks, beaming.

He says the spirit of competition tends to fall by the wayside once animators get a look at their rivals' work. Curiosity wins out over envy.

"We're all kind of at the same level, but everyone's pushing from different areas," he says of his fellow conventioneers.

"Some are pushing to create realistic-looking hair, and another's working to design clothing that folds properly, and everyone's pushing these fronts all over the place.

"Then everyone gets together once a year and says 'look what I've done,' and someone else says 'I've got a realistically growing beard,' and someone else says 'I've got shrubs that blow in the wind correctly'.

Every year it's getting closer and closer to absolute realism."

Still, though, that old competitive nature can pop up now and then.

"Information is shared pretty well, but a lot of times you get competition. But if you look at what other guys are doing you can kind of see from the results what kind of path they went down to get that way. Then you can do it."

Grime got his computer start after studying animation. His first work was on the old Commodore Amiga, an attach-to-your-television unit C.O.R.E. still uses for background colors.

He says the field of computer graphics has grown so much it's getting hard to spot CG when it's used.

"It's still animation, but it's getting more and more realistic. You've seen things like Apollo 13, which is photographic.

You can't tell where the live action stops and the animation begins. And it's all going that way."

Where does it go from here?

"People are the final thing," Grime says.

C.O.R.E. project takes flight

A tour of a special effects studio can be a thrilling thing.

Giant rubber heads, animatronic limbs, oozing mounds of gore and fantastic monsters are the usual inhabitants of any FX lab.

Things are a little different at C.O.R.E. Digital Pictures.

Everything's done on computers, meaning there's very little to see in the way of visual effects. The final product is every bit as stunning as old school FX — and maybe even more realistic — but until it hits the television or movie screen it's not much to look at.

C.O.R.E. has moved on from the dazzling effects of the TekWar series to a new project: the geese.

The geese will be featured in a still-unnamed film being shot in Canada that follows a man attempting to train a flock of geese by using his ultralight aircraft. The film, which has been in production under the tentative title Goose, stars Jeff Daniels , Dana Delaney and Anna Paquin.

The main problem was a fairly simple one: geese are tricky to train.

So C.O.R.E. was brought in to create geese in flight. It wasn't something C.O.R.E. had done, and after specializing in science fiction projects creating a bunch of geese may seem a bit anticlimatic. But the C.O.R.E. team was up to it.

"Regardless of what somebody asks us to do, we can quickly become specialized in doing whatever that is," says C.O.R.E. executive producer Stephen Price.

"They needed to get the geese to do things they can't do through training. They'd want them to fly in a particular formation, or have one break off from the flock, or have them swoop in close to the ground.

"And you can't train geese to do that very easily."

The film's producers issued C.O.R.E. a challenge: send some C.O.R.E. artificial geese into flight with the real thing.

"We put the 3D computer-generated geese into a scene with real geese," says C.O.R.E. partner John Mariela.

"The challenge was to see if (the producers) could spot our geese."

They couldn't, and for good reason. The computer-hatched geese are every bit as realistic as nature's, and with one advantage: they can be controlled.

Animator Alan Kapler, an FX veteran of the RoboCop series, began by obtaining a stuffed goose, which he mapped point by point by placing a 3D sensor over the goose's form. The result was a 3D grid map in cyberspace.

"Then I move the model through a series of geometric forms with vectors to create the flying motion," Kapler explains, deftly manoeuvering his computer's mouse to send the goose into flight.

Of course, it doesn't look much like a goose. Yet.

"We then add panels to texture-map the goose's skin," Kapler explains.

"Once that's done it still looks off because there's no color; it's just white. That's when we get to work on the goose's look."

Finally, drawing on stored plates containing feathers, bill, and color, the goose is ready for action. Kapler clicks his mouse, and the goose — superimposed on a black background — flaps its wings repeatedly.

"This is where we bring in the background," says Kapler, tapping on his keyboard and summoning up a scanned-in color shot of a forested landscape.

He moves the landscape under the goose, giving the illusion of flight. And it's a good illusion.

C.O.R.E. won the contract, meaning the film will feature plenty of geese that exist nowhere but cyberspace. And the audience will never notice.

Photo by JEL

Executive producer Stephen Price is heading up work on C.O.R.E. Digital's latest project — making geese fly.

Kapler built the effect from the ground up, something he says is a rarity at larger FX houses where animators work on bits and pieces of a larger effect.

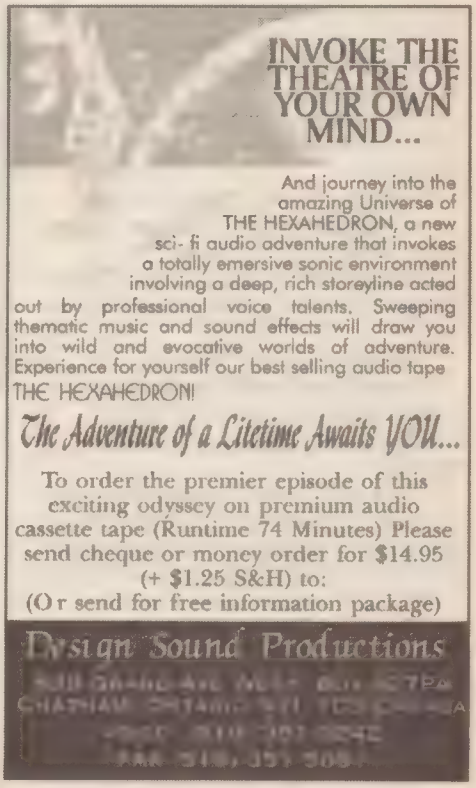
Kapler makes use of software called Prisms, by Side Effects.This is one of the sore points for anyone in the computer animation business, as software and hardware changes so quickly anyone in the business is constantly upgrading equipment.

"Things last an average of about three years, so you buy things you know are going to be useless in about that time," says Mariela.

Continued from page 10

"We'd like to create realistic computer-generated actors. A lot of people have mixed feelings about that, but there's digital stuntmen being used in movies right now, and digital explosions, so that's all taking over from the practical.

Kennedy Gordon is a Sudbury, Ontario-based entertainment writer.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New frontiers for Shatner

By
KENNEDY GORDON

William Shatner just isn't Captain Kirk, no matter how much you'd like to think so. For one thing, he doesn't throw any of those dramatic pauses into his sentences when he speaks. Instead, the star of Star Trek, creator of TekWar and C.O.R.E.

Digital Pictures' kingpin speaks slowly and carefully. The closest thing to a vocal idiosyncrasy is the odd "h-h-heh" tossed into bridge a thought.

Shatner, a Canadian who made his mark in Hollywood, has re-entered the world of Canadian film and television in a big way over the last few years. And it all began with the Tek novel series.

The first book was TekWar, a futuristic thriller about an ex-cop addicted to a mind-altering cyberdrug called Tek. Since Jake Cardigan kicked the habit and set off on his mission to rid the world of the Teklords who make the drug, the series has swelled to six volumes, with a seventh, TekMoney, on the way.

Tek came to life when Shatner had a little too much time on his hands.

"I was directing a Star Trek movie (Star Trek V: The Final Frontier), and there had been a strike by one of the unions that shut down all forward movement of the film, which had been in preproduction," Shatner remembers.

"I was hanging around not doing very much, so I thought I would write a screenplay."

That idea combined Shatner's two television series: the future science fiction world of Star Trek and the law enforcement hero of T.J. Hooker, in which Shatner played the uniformed cop of the title.

"And thus was born TekWar."

Teaming with science fiction Ron Goulard to write the books, Shatner quickly saw the Tek series become bestsellers.

"It's a field I never thought about going into. I'd been writing all my life, writing screenplays, but a novel had not occurred to me in that I never thought I had enough to say of any importance in a novel. Having written TekWar I think that I do."

The books are set several hundred years in the future, but that soon changed.

"When Marvel Comics came along and asked to do a series based on the books, I realized it would be better to have the visuals look 50 years into the future, so I made that change for the comics. Then, when Atlantis Films and I went forward in developing a TV series I kept that 50-years-from-now period of time rather than what the books had."

He didn't change the time period of the books, though, managing to maintain two separate versions of Tek reality.

"I think the people who buy them expect me to maintain the integrity of the books, and I have no reason to change that."

TekWar made its television debut as a series of four movies-of-the-week starring Greg Evigan as Jake Cardigan. Shatner played Bascom, the mysterious head of the private detective firm that hires the disgraced Cardigan after his release from a cryo-prison sentence for Tek offences.

Those four films did well enough for Atlantis to turn TekWar into a weekly

series, running in Canada in the United States.

It was during the course of the series' production that Shatner encountered Bob Munroe, who had been hired (along with several others) to create the computer-generated special effects for the show.

Those computer animators — Munroe, Kyle Menzies, Derek Grime and later John Mariela — soon formed their own company, C.O.R.E. Digital Pictures. And Shatner got in on the ground floor.

"I'm one of the original partners," he explains. "I was there as the partners were assembled before they ever became C.O.R.E. We worked hand-in-glove, especially Bob Munroe and myself, and when the decision was reached to form a partnership they came to me and asked me to be a part of it."

He sees his role as a vital one.

"Obviously, I'm not a computer artist. But I'm somebody who can bring them publicity, bring them business, deal with the public, and put in money. I brought as important a component as the drawing, just as essential as someone sitting in front of a computer station and drawing a computer graphic."

C.O.R.E. immediately rocketed to the top of the computer-graphic heap, gaining its reputation on TekWar, Johnny Mnemonic and the Outer Limits, among others. Then came the bad news.

"I was deeply disappointed," Shatner says of the decision to pull the plug on TekWar. Ratings were poor and interest in the show had waned, but he blames that on bad scheduling.

"We were on the USA Network and CTV, but people just couldn't find us. They kept shifting the timeslot around. It wasn't well-handled in terms of promotion and getting people to look at it. My feeling was it was a good show, something people could get a hold on, but people couldn't find it. So I was deeply disappointed."

But, Shatner being an optimist, he found the silver lining.

"I learned a great deal," he says, "not the least of which was discovering the people, my partners in C.O.R.E., and learning of Canada's great facility in making films."

It's somewhat ironic — and more than a little gratifying, from a patriotic standpoint — that Shatner is back in Canada (on occasion) to work in the genre that made him famous. It's not just the creation of science fiction ideas that make Canada great, he says, but the capabilities of the people working behind the scenes.

"Canadian science fiction, led by William Gibson is in great shape," Shatner says. "In terms of the techniques of Sci-Fi we're one of the best in the world, and C.O.R.E. is the best in Canada, so that puts C.O.R.E. right up there in terms of worldwide competition."

Despite those proud boasts, Shatner says his experience as a writer has taught him the necessity of caution: don't let the effects overwhelm the story.

"I think that what so many science fiction stories miss it the absolute necessity for a human story to be involved in the science fiction technology. C.O.R.E. can enhance a science fiction film, they can make it visually overwhelming, but you can't get people into the seats without a human story."

And being part of C.O.R.E. has given him a new outlook on the digital effects business. What did he learn? Well, he's more sure than ever about C.O.R.E.'s superiority.

"I'm preparing a movie right now and I've wanted to be very careful in terms of vested interest in C.O.R.E. and the people who would be hired to do a lot of our computer graphics. But everything leads us to the excellence of C.O.R.E. in a component of the movie."

That film is called Virtual Hero, and Shatner is behind the camera as director.

"It's being designed for release in about a year," he says. "Directing is my biggest thrill."

That's not all. Far from turning his back on Captain Kirk, who died in the most recent Trek movie, Generations, Shatner has thrown on his Starfleet uniform in a new capacity — author. Working with Canadian writers Garfield and Judith Reeves-Stevens, Shatner has entered the filled-to-bursting world of Star Trek novels with a recent hardcover called Ashes of Eden, featuring the post-Starfleet exploits of James T. Kirk.

"It's the first of a trilogy," Shatner says.

"I'm partway through the second novel and blocking out the third."

The new Star Trek trilogy arose out of an attempt by Shatner to revive Kirk, possibly for a new feature film.

"The genesis of that came after this last movie in which the character I play died," he explains. He's talking about Star Trek Generations, of course, in which Kirk finally met his demise, crushed by a steel catwalk on a desert planet across the galaxy.

But that wasn't enough Kirk for Shatner. "I came up with an idea that would bring him back to life. It was such a good idea I broached it to Star Trek management and they said 'oh, that's interesting.'

"So I said it was such a good idea I'd like to try writing a novel about it, and writing a novel would show Paramount where the screenplay would go."

That novel wasn't Ashes of Eden, though. Ashes is more or less a precursor to Shatner's resurrection concept.

"Then it was suggested by the publishers that I write a trilogy, and it occurred to me that I would surround that good idea with something that happened before and something that happened afterward, and make a grand adventure out of it."

So he got to work on volume one, which picks up after Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country.

"Ashes of Eden is an old screenplay of mine for a Star Trek movie that I would like to have done, so I novelized that with the help of Gar and Judy. They're just fabulous talents. So I worked with them revamping that screenplay."

The Reeves-Stevens team is no stranger to science fiction. With both Star Trek novels (Prime Directive) and non-Trek sci-fi books (Garfield's Dark Matter) to their credit, they've built up an impressive resume of mainstream-friendly science fiction.

> "There's a new novel, nothing to do with Star Trek, called Manowar, coming out this fall, and I think it's the best thing I've done."

The first novel leads up to the resurrection, and concerns itself with a story the 60-something Kirk (and 64-year-old Shatner) would find intriguing: the recapture of youth.

"It begins with the search for the fountain of youth by Kirk and the discovery that it doesn't exist," says Shatner.

"And then this adventure takes place in the second novel. The third novel then reaches even further into a broader plane, I think."

The big question remains, though: is Paramount going to film these stories? And does Shatner want to play Kirk yet again?

"Oh yeah, it's a wonderful character. But it doesn't seem likely now. And that's cool. I'm on to Manowar."

Now what's this? Another project? It seems as if trying to juggle the vastly different realities of Star Trek, TekWar and the world of Virtual Hero isn't enough, and Shatner has another realm of fantasy to work with: his latest book.

"There's a new novel, nothing to do with Star Trek, called Manowar, coming out in the fall, and I think it's the best thing I've done."

The plot is classic sci-fi: "Mars has become a source of supply for Earth — minerals and food — and there's labour trouble."

Isn't that how TekWar came to be in the first place?

Ironic.

For the love of the craft

Babylon 5's former make-up wiz, describes wonder of creating new lifeforms

By
CHRIS KREJLGAARD

When you talk about special effects with Everett Burrell, it is almost impossible not to be swept away by his enthusiasm.

His eyes sparkle as he talks about the magic of watching 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, the Thunderbirds or Captain Scarlett when he was a boy, or about watching Star Wars for the first time in 1977.

He marvels at the special effects that were present in those works. And now that he is able to bring a bit of magic to the movie and television screen the thrill is still there.

Whether it was creating bats for Batman returns, mechanical pigeons for Forget Paris or aliens for Babylon 5, Burrell delights in talking about one of the aspects of the genre that has helped renew interest in science fiction on the large and small screen.

Since 1983, Burrell has worked on such films as Dungeon Master, Ghoulies, Day of the Dead, Nightmare on Elm Street III, Tales From the Crypt and Aliens.

For the past two seasons, Burrell and his company Optic Nerve handled the make-up related special effects on Babylon 5.

But now as the show enters its third season, Burrell won't be behind the scenes.

He's formed his own company, Burrell Productions, and has begun working on the syndicated series, Hercules.

It is a move that both excites and saddens Burrell — at least on a personal level.

The fact that he will be working with 3-D computer graphics to develop the effects for the show is clearly thrilling for a man who has been

intrigued by special effects since he was a boy in California.

"Computer graphics that's where the future is, and I want to be part of it," Burrell says, his voice rising slightly. "I don't want to be left behind.

"You take 3-D data that you can animate and manipulate. It's so much more satisfying because you have more control over what you do.

"As a make-up artist, you had to rely on other departments to make it look the way you wanted. You had to make compromises constantly and after awhile you just gave up because it wasn't what you envisioned.

"It just wasn't worth getting into an argument over."

In addition, the normal restrictions of space and physics no longer apply.

His new venture actually had its roots about five years ago. And like many of the other influences in his professional career, the change was sparked by something he saw on a screen.

"The Abyss was the turning point. When the water tentacle came on the screen, I knew you couldn't come close to it in the real world. You could only do it with a computer."

But with the new direction came the realization that he had to severe a link with his past — Optic Nerve, a make-up effects company that constructed effects as simple as rubber noses to mechanical arms.

Photo courtesty of Warner Bros.

The split from the company he co-founded with John Vulich and from Babylon 5 has not been easy.

"We really struggled hard to make Optic Nerve be recognized for computer graphics, but people only saw us as make-up effects," he said. "We were very stereotyped.

"We couldn't get the respect. So I decided that the only way that I could do this was to physically leave the company and start over.'

In fact, there is a sense that the quest to be at the top or on the cutting edge of the field has cost Burrell in a number of ways — as it does anyone else in the field.

"At one time, there were 25 or 30 make-up shops within a 20-mile radius of each other, and we were all friends at one time working for other effects guys," he explains between sips of water. "Then we all went off on our own and now we don't talk to each other.

"It kinda sucks, cause I was close friends with a lot of these guys.

Burrell explains that in his younger days he envisioned the industry as a massive collaborative effort. But it was a vision that quickly dissolved.

"You are a threat to your competitors. And then you get into issues that people have to eat and you've got to pay the rent. These are realities and they hit hard."

And it is this aspect of money that seems to trouble Burrell the most, even though, by his own admission, money likely laid at the heart of the decision that saw Optic Nerve go behind the scenes of Babylon 5.

"We bid on the project, just like everyone else in town, and I still don't

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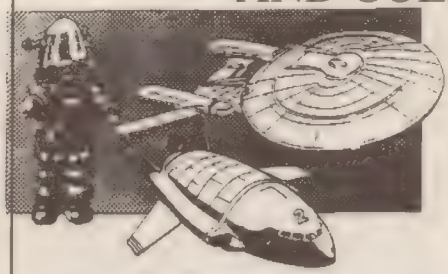

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know why they picked us," he admits. "My guess is that we were very enthusiastic, we were very cheap and I think they knew we could do the job. And that's really the bottom line for a producer.

"He's going to say who's going to give me the best price right off the bat. And then he goes 'who's going to be good at it — even though I don't care.' And they all pretend to care, and they all pretend to be honest. But I really think deep down it's monetary."

There is more than a hint of sadness in Burrell's voice as he talks about the selection.

"And that's a little unfortunate, because they have a tough job to balance between the money and the artistic end and I don't think they're very artistic."

Despite this, Burrell is quick to point out that the early days on the series were viewed as a challenge for the Optic Nerve crew — an opportunity to make a statement in science fiction.

"We said 'we'll give you our all, and we did. It was a labour of love. It was our chance."

At the time of Babylon 5's launch, Star Trek the Next Generation had been on the air for years and its audience was entrenched.

But Burrell notes that there was little opportunity for make-up people such as himself to work on the series because such work was monopolized by a handful of individuals and companies. Besides, "Even if you could work on Star Trek, you couldn't do what you wanted to because the designs were pre-fabricated a long time ago."

So Burrell and Optic Nerve found themselves with a "whole new world" to construct from scratch.

After a season of "working our asses off," the team beat the venerable Star Trek for an Emmy for best Make-up in 1994. An honour that Burrell doesn't take lightly.

"It was kinda cool at first. I said, 'well, I don't know I didn't realize how hard it was for them.

"I think we set a trend now, Star Trek can no longer just crank out a forehead or a nose piece, because they have to compete with Babylon 5 and that's the whole point — competition is good."

Photo by JEL

Burrell notes that the complexion of Star Trek has begun to change as a result of the challenges it has faced from upstarts such as Babylon 5.

"Star Trek was never known for it's aliens or its special effects. It was known for good stories," he said.

But while the initial season was an opportunity to be seized, Babylon 5's second year was one where the corporate structure reinstituted itself behind the scenes.

"The first season they gave us carte blanche, but not any money. The second season came, and they said 'well, we have a little bit more money, but now we want things done our way'."

Rather than fight, Burrell and Optic Nerve rationalized the situation as would many others in the same situation — acquiesce to the people who pay the bills.

"It's a shitty attitude," Burrell says of the money people, "Because they really relied on us to make the first season successful, but then they didn't want to talk to us, to say 'Hey you're part of what made the first season successful.

"They just wanted us to shut up and do our job. They pay the bills and you do what they want. "That's show biz."

And this corporate attitude was in conflict with one of the driving forces behind Burrell's work — to bring an element of artistry to make-up.

"Aliens in science fiction can be anything you want. They can be a blob of glowing light. They can also be something artistically really cool."

Burrell, who was influenced by the works of Frank Frazetta, Bernie Wrightson and John Byrne, said he wanted to bring some of this artistry to his work.

The only problem was that, unlike comic book art, the human body was a hindrance to bring aliens to the small screen.

But there were moments such as a scene in Parliament of Dreams which required almost full body make-up for the character of G'Kar, which allowed Burrell and his colleagues to indulge in their artist bent.

And it is moments such as these — and when he sees aspiring artists at conventions — when the wonder and appreciation that Burrell knew watching television as a youngster in California is recaptured.

Winnipeg firm recolours comic industry

By
JIM TIMLICK

Digital Chameleon has set new standards for the comic industry says president Chris Chuckry.

Computers seem to be integrating themselves into our lives at every turn.

Need some cash? Try hitting the nearest automated teller. Want to visit with someone on the other side of the world without ever leaving home? All you need is a home computer and a modem.

The applications seem limitless.

It was that kind of thinking that inspired partners Lovern Kindzierski and Chris Chuckry to form Digital Chameleon four-and-a-half-years ago.

The Winnipeg-based computer coloring studio has since transformed the way Batman, the X-Men and their comic book brethren are brought to multi-coloured life.

More than one-tenth of all comic books produced in North America are now colored by computer painters at Digital Chameleon. Their clients include industry heavyweights like Marvel, DC and Image.

"We knew it could be done. We knew technically it was possible. Whether we could do it quickly enough? Could we maintain a high quality?" Chuckry recalls thinking.

The traditional method of colouring comic books is a crude labour-intensive process. A colourist provides a guide that indicates which colour goes where on a page. The appropriate colours are then cut by hand and applied to a plastic overlay to fit the space.

Digital Chameleon has sped up the process and refined it.

Black and white artwork is scanned directly into an Apple Macintosh computer where it is stored on disk. The colour artist calls up the page on his or her screen where an electronic airbrush is used to apply the colour. From there it is sent to be separated.

Rather than limiting creativity, computers enhance it, Kindzierski says.

The computer can generate 16.8 million color tones whereas the old system offers a measly 164 shades.

"The system that we have is designed specifically to give me all the tools I have when I sit down in my studio with my airbrush and my Japanese watercolours and my markers," says Kindzierski, who has been colouring comics for about 12 years.

Among the titles that Kindzierski has worked on during that time are Batman, Spiderman and the X-Men.

"The kind of work I'm doing on a book like PunX (for Acclaim Comics), if I was painting it by hand I wouldn't be able to do the same kind of work. It would just take too long. We've basically cut out a step."

Chuckry concedes it took about a year-and-a-half to get the system up to speed . . . literally. The initial computers were simply not able to process information quickly enough. A standard 22-page comic can now be coloured and separated within three days.

"A lot of it was learning as we went along. It was really trial by fire," Chuckry says.

Digital Chameleon has grown from two employees to more than 35 and produces an average of 700 pages of coloured artwork a month — nearly double what it did just over a year ago. Rather than soliciting work, the company now has to turn it down. A remarkable turn of events considering the initial resistance the company has met with.

"It was tough at the beginning because we were something of an unknown quantity," says Chuckry.

"Our first real break was with Image Comics. Those were high-profile books and they forced Marvel and the other companies to realize that color counts as a selling feature. It's now the standard by which all other books are judged."

Conflicting personalities

Playing two divergent sides a challenge for Roxann Biggs Dawson

By CHRIS KREJLGAARD

Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures

Like other Star Trek characters before her, B'Elanna Torres is a personality that is being pulled apart.

The half-Klingon and half-human chief engineer must tackle the demons that are created by the two divergent sides of her personality.

It is hardly a new concept to the Star Trek Universe.

But while the idea of two cultures coming into conflict in one person is hardly new, Torres is the first main character in any Star Trek series who is forced to deal with two such conflicting sides.

The two sides are at constant odds, just as the character is at odds with the strict regiment of Starfleet.

It is a challenge for the character and for the actress who portrays her.

Los Angeles native Roxann Biggs-Dawson is relaxing between seasons at the time of the interview.

During the conversation she makes it clear that portraying the half-human, half Klingon engineer is an acting challenge she enjoys.

Near the midway point of the first season came the most-telling episode regarding the challenges of portraying the character.

In Faces, Torres has been captured by a race of aliens who need a constant supply of body parts to replenish those destroyed by a disease.

One of the race's scientists is intrigued by Torres's dual heritage. Using his race's technology, he is able to extract the Klingon essence from Torres so that her human half and her Klingon half each have a body of their own.

Inevitably, Torres's two sides realize that they must each overcome their inherent weaknesses and co-operate if they are to escape their captors.

They do escape, but in the process she discovers that each side needs the other if she is to survive.

"That was what was most challenging, to actually play the two sides and really play things with myself. It was an amazing experience."

The episode notwithstanding, playing the character has been a challenge since she auditioned for the role.

Like most actors who have joined the crew of Voyager, Biggs-Dawson was aware of the existence of Star Trek (who isn't), but she had never seen an episode of the series.

It is a factor, according to the actress, that helped her land the role.

Biggs-Dawson says entering her audition with no pre-

conceptions regarding the series was key to her securing the role and to understanding the character better.

"I'm actually glad that I came in as blind as I did (regarding the Star Trek mythos), because it forced me to really internalize who she was and her struggles than I would have if I knew about th Klingons and how they are supposed to act."

After she got the nod from producers, Biggs-Dawson promptly got ahold of all the Klingon-related episodes from The Next Generation and began studying the Star Trek Encyclopedia "almost as though it were an historical character," she explains.

"It was sort of like looking at the history of the Klingons, even though they are in the future.

"I learned quite a bit about the Klingons. But I loved that my initial contact with the character was kind of pristine."

Since she has begun playing Torres before the cameras, Biggs-Dawson has attempted to find that delicate balance between the character's two sides.

"I try to understand her relationship to a given situation from moment to moment and then determining the dose of human and the dose of Klingon that the situation calls on."

Biggs-Dawson notes that while she is determining what qualities the character is calling up on, she also must determine what qualities — sides are being denied at the same moment.

And it is this idea of denial that is central to the character of B'Elanna Torres.

"Whether she's drawing on her Klingon side or denying says a lot about her in different situations," Biggs-Dawson explains.

Like any actor, Biggs-Dawson draws on elements of her own personality to bring the character to life.

"I think I've got those sides to me and I think that is what's the most fun, because they both get to come out," she laughs. "The hot-tempered, warrior side of me is there if I want it to come through.

"But there's also the more vulnerable side and I love that in every episode I get the opportunity to explore both of them in varying degrees. It's very liberating."

Besides the challenge of portraying the character, Biggs-Dawson notes that there is also a challenge of playing a character in the "Star Trek genre.

"The pressure is from myself, because I want to live up to the tradition and doing Star Trek is very much like doing an historical piece.

Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures

Since the launch of Star Trek Voyager, the two sides of Torre's personality have just begun to be explored.

"You want to make sure that when you are stepping into this particular genre, that you are really existing in that world. You want to make sure that you understand the language and the protocol because you want to live up to that tradition."

Despite the lengthy list of acting credits, Biggs-Dawson was somewhat unprepared for the rigours of having a role in the Star Trek Universe.

"It's like night and day," she chuckles. "The others were all very normal.

"This is a very heightened show. And it's very different. The techno-babble is something you never learn in school, they don't have classes like Techno-babble One-A.

"It's like learning a new language and it's hard to get your mouth to move for some of the words. I don't think that the writers try to say the words."

But despite the mouth-contorting aspect of Star Trek's language, the heightened atmosphere on the show and demands of playing a character who could easily belong on some 24th century psychiatrist's couch, Biggs-Dawson relishes her time in front of the camera.

Given the past history of recent Star Trek series, Biggs-Dawson says that Torres "is the only character that I've played that I could see doing for seven years.

"She definitely has seven years of development. But my only fear is that the writers will reveal too much of her too soon."

But if they don't, there is a good chance that the 24th century human-Klingon chief engineer will still be around in the 21st century.

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SOMETIMES YOU'VE GOT TO GET WITH THE TIMES

Conversation with a demon

Written by
GERALD UPTON
Illustrated by
JOHN TKACHUK

It all started the day I conjured up a demon.

I know you're going to sit there with your 20th Century mind-set and tell me I couldn't possibly do that. Not in this day and age. You'll say there's no such thing.

Hell, you could be right. I mean, he certainly didn't look like a demon. But I conjured him, and the procedure in the book was definitely entitled *To Conjure a Demon*.

What did he look like?

Well, let me describe him for you. A bit less than six-feet tall (I'm guessing he was lying down). Two legs, with feet on the ends (covered with boots, so I can't be too exact), two arms with hands and fingers. A head on the top with eyes, ears, nose, mouth, some hair on top, all in the usual places. Sort of a peachy beige skin. Yeah, you're right, very much like a human. In fact, so much like a human I couldn't tell the difference.

However, the instructions definitely said "demon." In fact, they used the term several times. Maybe I'd blown a parameter or something, and conjured up the wrong thing . . . uh, person . . . uh, entity. But you're missing the really mind-boggling part of all this. I had conjured up SOMETHING!

I'd just drawn the diagram, lit the fire, said the magic words, and *poof*, there he was.

I had this terrible urge to go over the instructions once more, to see if I had blown something. Well, why not? I mean, the guy — if that's what he was — seemed pretty well stuck inside my diagram . . . pentagram . . . dimensional-locating circuit . . . whatever.

He wasn't moving anything except his eyes, which were darting back and forth. I recalled that the instructions said he couldn't move until I freed him. So I went and took a look at the book.

I said it all started when I conjured up a demon, but that's not entirely true. I mean, I couldn't have done it without the book. Maybe I should have said it all started the day I found the book.

I sometimes think I should be calling it *The Book*.

It's very big and impressive. It has a beautiful brown leather cover, glued and hand-stitched over what sounds like wooden inserts. The pages are these really thick, high-quality, rich-looking sheets of paper — probably vellum or parchment or something like that. All the stuff inside is handwritten on the pages in a brown ink, sepia ink, I think they call it. The brown writing looks very classy on the light-reddish- beige paper. The handwriting is really good too. It's so regular and even that, if I hadn't found some mistakes and erasures, I would have thought it was printed in script.

Where did I find the book?

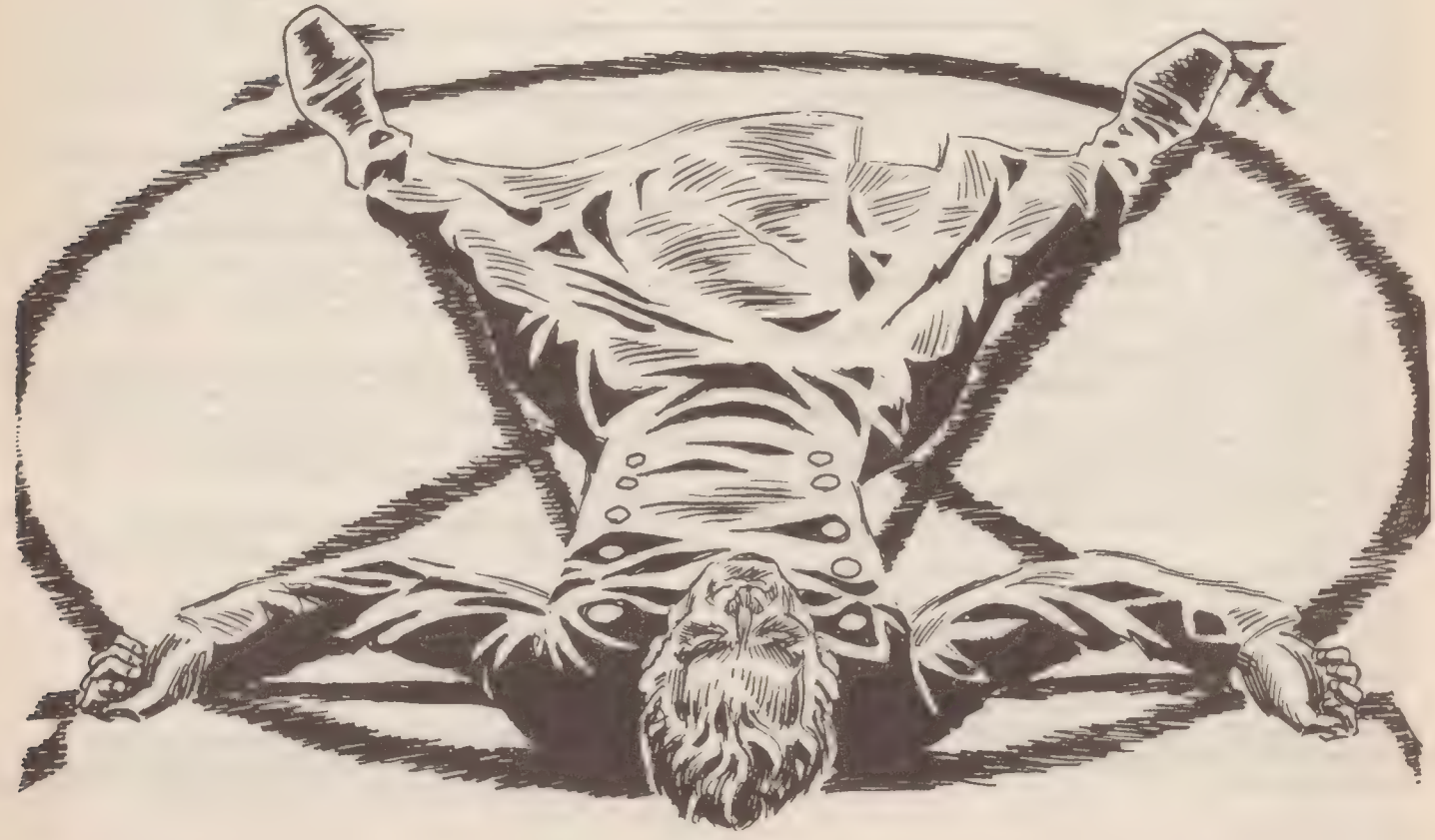
Well, that's almost a story in itself, but I'll try to keep it short.

I found it the day I went down by myself to a Red Sox game that got rained out. It was a long drive, but I had excellent tickets. My old man had managed to get a pair of his company's tickets and gave them to me. It was a last-minute thing. He isn't a baseball fan, but he knows I am.

The trouble was, no one could get away to go with me. It was a Thursday night game, and everybody was busy. Too short notice, I guess.

I didn't care. I wasn't going to miss an opportunity like this. First base side, right by home plate, three rows up. You can hear the players grunt when they swing.

You bet I wasn't going to miss this. I drove all the way down from southern Vermont in my old car. One guy with two tickets. I went early. I had vague thoughts of dropping into some of the



neighborhood bars near Fenway and seeing if I could find a lonely, good-looking female sports fan. Okay, I will admit I AM into fantasy. Also science fiction.

The weather just wasn't with me. When I got to Boston it was raining. The wind was from the southeast, blowing clouds in from the ocean, and they were dumping some of their weight before they had to climb the mountains.

I had the game broadcast station on the radio as I drove into Boston.

An hour before game time, it had already been officially cancelled. Keep your tickets if you haven't already come down, they're good for a rain check, etc, etc. Great! I could come back another day with a friend. Of course, the seats wouldn't be half as good, but . . . Meanwhile, here I was rolling into Boston after a long drive with nothing to do.

I remembered this book store I'd heard of, the Concord Used Book Emporium. What the heck, I always love to browse a good book store.

I looked it up in the phone book at a roadside payphone and got the address. Then I drove around looking for it.

I got lost four times. Honest! I'm not exaggerating! I *HATE* driving in Boston!

Eventually I found it. No more than twenty minutes later I found a close (and legal) parking spot. Trust me, in Boston, half a mile *IS* close.

The store was an old brick building, three stories tall, stuck in tight between other old brick buildings. They looked so venerable it was not hard to imagine posters stuck on the front that said "Uncle Sam wants YOU for the Great War."

I went inside, and the place was crammed with books. Paperbacks, hard covers, folios, you name it, they had it. They were in shelves on all the walls, and sometimes in cardboard boxes on the floor. I wondered if they had any old Greek scrolls in the back.

The store took up all three floors, and the basement as well. I know, because they had a hand-lettered directory sign behind the front desk telling you where everything was. It said things like "Romance: Second Floor," and "Westerns: Third Floor." What I was looking for was "Science Fiction/Fantasy: Basement." (Why do we always get stuck in the basement?)

So I went down into the basement to have a look. They had a LOT of books. I started browsing.

After a while, I was less impressed. A used bookstore depends for its stock on what walks in the door. I figure serious readers hold onto the books they enjoy, and most SF/F readers I know are serious about it. What this meant in this case is that the store mostly had old classics, and the really unpopular stuff. But they had a LOT of it. After about an hour, I'd only found two items I was interested in.

By this time, I was near the back, where the light is dim. I stumbled over an old cardboard box lying on the floor. There was a big stack of faded, dog-eared typewritten pages on top. Probably just one of Robert Heinlein's original manuscripts. I could see books underneath. On impulse, I started digging through it.

I liked the book as soon as I saw it. It looked really classy and different. It had the weight of ages to it (and the dust to match). I blew hard on it, and it lost about a pound. I had to step back out of the cloud to breathe.

I started to look through it, and it was fascinating. It was in English, and had all these intriguing descriptions and recipes. Descriptions of magic spells. Recipes for magic potions. Toward the back there were notes and diagrams and floor plans of castles and palaces and stuff like that, with maps on how to find them. I couldn't figure out what countries they might be in, but that didn't matter right now.

I have a friend who's big into fantasy role playing, and I figured he'd love this for atmosphere or as a prop or something.

I took it to the front desk along with the other two books I had. I was going to ask how much, but first I asked the guy where it came from. He said it had just come in two days ago. Some woman brought it in. She had moved into an old farm house, and was cleaning out the attic.

I asked how much, there's no price marked. Three bucks, he said, it's just full of gibberish. I paid. Then I turned it around on the desk, and opened it to face him. I could see the writing, and it was so clear I could read some of it upside down. I asked, "You really don't know what language this is?"

He glanced down, and said, "Nope. Sammy, in the back, he knows some Chinese, and says he'd recognize it if it was in Japanese. I got a guy comes in looking for any Arabic books, and he says it ain't that. It's not written in any alphabet anyone recognizes, so it certainly ain't any European language. Maybe Swahili or something."

He'd been writing something — in English — when I came up. He certainly wasn't illiterate. He couldn't read this book, but I could. I was getting a strange feeling about the whole thing. Oh, well, I could look through the book later, and try to see if I could figure it out.

He'd been writing something — in English — when I came up. He certainly wasn't illiterate. He couldn't read this book, but I could. I was getting a strange feeling about the whole thing. Oh, well, I could look through the book later, and try to see if I could figure it out. It was time to head home if I didn't want to drive in the dark.

I kept thinking about the book as I drove. Was I really the only one who could read this strange old book? Sounded like a good start to a fantasy novel. I wondered if I could write it up, and then find an editor who'd buy it. Anyway, as I went along, I got more and more interested in taking a long look inside the book.

I got home, and my parents were out. I took the book upstairs, plonked it on my desk, and sat down to it. I put the other two books aside. Joel Rosenburg and Robert Jordan could wait.

I spent about an hour leafing through the book, reading here and there. It was fascinating. Spells for invisibility, causing sleep, making a big explosion, flying. Hey, here's a recipe for a love potion. I wondered if I could use it on Naomi. That could be fun.

Before I started taking this seriously, I decided to make one more little test on it. I called up Phil, the guy who's into FRP. He was at home and not doing much, so I took the book over to show him. He thought it was neat, a real great prop for FRP. Too bad it's in some foreign language. Do I wanna sell it to him? I told him maybe later.

Next day, at my summer job, I kept thinking about the book. Could it really be a . . .? Nah! Maybe if I tried . . . I don't think so! What if . . . ? Ah, forget it!

By the time quitting time came around, I'd decided to try one of the spells. You know, just in case they actually did work. Something that would provide a visible, demonstrable result. Maybe something that would provide me with some more information.

I went through the book, looking for something I had seen before. Ah, there it was. *"To Summon a Demon."* I read through the spell description carefully and started taking notes.

"Seven-foot circle inscribed on a stone floor." No problem. "Five-point star inside, the points touching the circle." I thought I could do that.

"Add these symbols outside the circle, where the points meet it." "This symbol to summon the demon to this plane."

"This symbol to keep him on the plane."

"This symbol to immobilize the demon."

"This symbol to allow direct communication."

"Burn this concoction in a brazier placed at this point to instill loyalty and friendliness in the demon."

"Erasure of each symbol will eliminate its power."

And on like that.

I was starting to wonder if this was a put-on. Somehow this didn't impress me as being from an ancient tome of arcane knowledge. I mean, it read like computer instructions. Each symbol was neatly diagrammed, with dimensions, even.

I decided to do it in the basement, death by noxious fumes being preferable to the neighbors' scorn. I drew out the diagram, lit the disgusting mess, and read the words while pointing to the appropriate symbols.

Despite my skepticism, I decided to go ahead with it. I figured nothing was going to happen, anyway. Then I could stop wondering about it, and sell the book to Phil for ten bucks. Hey, I gotta get some gas mileage out of it.

I started to make a shopping list.

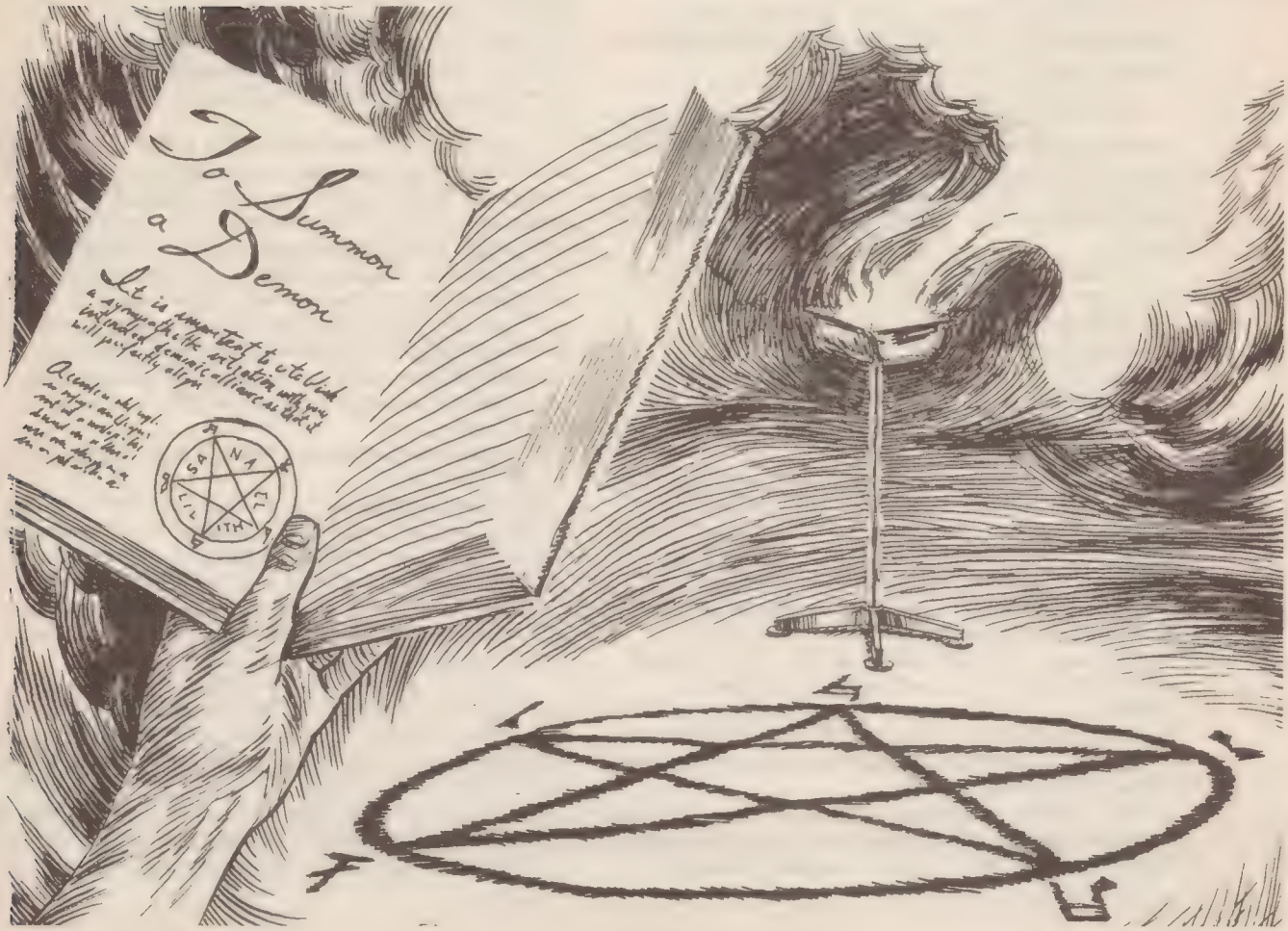
Chalk. I'd need chalk to draw the diagram and the symbols. We had a ruler in the kitchen drawer, no sweat about that. String, too. I needed some kind of brazier. Well, there was an old ashtray around the house somewhere. No, better yet, there was that unused hibachi in a corner of the garage. Charcoal? Barbecue briquettes.

That meant I just needed the exotic ingredients for the loyalty concoction. Luckily this town is a fairly cosmopolitan place. I mean, eye of squid, toe of frog, and brain of sheep are not hard to get when you have a sushi bar and an ethnic meat market in town.

After I'd picked the stuff up, and was driving back, I started wondering just exactly where I was going to do this. I didn't really want to do this in the garage. What if someone dropped in? What were they going to ask? "Say, that looks interesting. What exactly are you doing?" I wasn't sure I wanted to do it in the basement, either. If I didn't asphyxiate myself with the charcoal fumes, what about the 'concoction?' I was supposed to put it into the burning charcoal. What if it reeked the house out? Dad was gonna look at me sternly and say, "Couldn't you have done the barbecue bit out-of-doors, at least? What *ARE* you cooking?"

I decided to do it in the basement, death by noxious fumes being preferable to the neighbors' scorn. I drew out the diagram, lit the disgusting mess, and read the words while pointing to the appropriate symbols.

The final *"Demon, I summon you!"* I said dramatically, expecting to have to follow it up with



some chagrined punch line. What I got instead was a poof and a shock.

This brings me back to what I have just finished explaining isn't really the beginning. If you get the impression I'm procrastinating, you're right, that's exactly what I was doing. What was I going to do with this 'thing' now that I had it here? Oh, yeah. Proof that the spell worked, and then information. Well, the spell certainly had worked. I had my poof, uh, proof. Now, what to ask it?

A deep voice behind me said, "The least you could do is let me up."

"What?" I said, turning quickly.

It was the demon, lying on the floor. "This floor is rather cold. It's chilling my butt. So how about it, kid?"

You may be wondering why he was prone on the floor. That was my initial reaction, too, but it didn't last long. I guess I'd been watching too much TV or something, but what I expected to see was the demon appear upright in a

THE DEMON APPEARED, BUT HE WASN'T QUITE WHAT WAS EXPECTED

cloud of smoke from the brazier. What I did see seemed right, however. The guy appeared spread-eagled in the pentagram, each of his arms, legs and head in a point of the star.

The other thing that intrigued me was the way the guy talked, as opposed to how I heard him. What actually came out of his mouth was a series of sounds that made no sense at all. What I heard was in English. It was as if there was an instant translator in my head. I noticed this dual-sound thing at first because it was new to me. In short order I stopped noticing it, unless I actually listened for it.

In response to his last query, I asked, quite intelligently, "How about what?"

"How about letting me get up? Within the confines of the diagram? You know, so I can look and feel more like a person, instead of a bear-skin rug?"

"Can I do that?" I asked, like a fool.

"Sure," he said easily. "Just erase the lower part of the containment character. The part that looks like an upside down 'T' with a diagonal cross-piece."

I glanced in the book, which I was still holding, and found the proper spot. "You're right. That's what it says here."

He rolled his head to look at me. "Say, you're kind of new at this, aren't you, kid?"

"Well, um, sort of."

He gave me a stern look. "First time, right?"

"Uh, ya."

"Good. So how about it?"

"How about what?"

Sigh. "Letting me up."

I'm not as slow as the above exchange makes me sound. Mostly I was stalling for time. Not that I needed time or anything. I was just reluctant to do what he wanted, even though the book said it was okay. My reluctance had something to do with thoughts of making deals with demons, and how they could be fast talkers and sneaky dealers, or something like that.

Reluctantly, I used the toe of my shoe to rub out that part of the symbol. The chalk mark didn't smear or anything, it just ceased to exist as soon as I began rubbing. Not even chalk residue in the pits of the floor. Interesting.

The guy climbed to his feet, rubbed at his butt, and said thanks like he didn't mean it.

Did I mention what he was wearing? It was this big blue coat thing, that covered him from throat to wrists to ankles. Sort of reminded me of pictures I've seen of Russian cossack coats of about 200 years ago. And boots, black boots. I couldn't tell if he was wearing anything else.

After he had finished dusting himself off, he turned to me and said, "So whadaya want?"

"Hunh?"

He looked annoyed. "For why did you summon me here? What is it you require of me? What can I do to serve you, Master? WHADAYA WANT?"

"Oh. Well, I wanted to find out if this stuff in here works. Also I was hoping you might know something about this book I have." I was still holding it in my hands.

"That book? Looks like a magician's personal workbook to me. Good quality materials, good workmanship, lemme see the writing for a moment." I reversed it so he could see. He nodded. "Yup, painstaking writing. Magician's workbook."

I shrugged my shoulders. "But we haven't had magic around here for at least a thousand years. That I know of."

"Where'd you get it?" He asked quickly.

"In the attic of an old house. This book looks old, but not a thousand years old."

"Look," he explained, "it's a magic book. It contains magic, it's made with magic, and it can absorb more from its owner. It's full of magic! That tends to keep it in good shape and safe from harm. In theory, it could last forever. Mind if I ask you a question, kid? You say this is the first time you've ever done something like this." He peered at me.

"Weren't you afraid?"

"Well, no, not really. You see, I didn't really expect it to work. No one believes in magic any more."

The 'demon' looked down thoughtfully. "You mean, you don't have magic in your world, and you haven't had any for a thousand years?" He looked up, and his eyes locked with mine. There was a large grin spreading across his face. "Lemme outta this magical jail, kid! With your knowhow and my magic, we could rule the whole planet! How does anyone get anything done around here without magic?"

I closed the book and put it on my father's desk beside me. "Ruling the planet may not be as easy as you think. We don't have magic here, but we do have something called technology. In many ways it's just as good as magic, maybe better. More dependable. Like, its just a different way to produce the same effect. I don't know if magic would be a big improvement over technology."

"How can you say that, kid?" he demanded, sounding offended. "Magic is all-powerful! It can do things you wouldn't believe possible. I'm sure some other method, such as this 'teknology' of yours, couldn't come near to duplicating it."

"So give me an example," I said, leaning my hip on the edge of the desk.

He didn't even pause. "Well, how about this? It is one of the very minor magics, but something I can demonstrate safely even here in this confined area. I can produce fire at will!" He followed that with a couple of words which translated as gibberish, made some quick gestures with his hands, and suddenly there was a candle flame flickering atop the end of his index finger.

Now don't get me wrong. I really was impressed by this. As far as I could tell, he had produced this flame by magic alone, without any kind of aid. Having done one bit of magic myself, I was willing to believe that this was not a trick. What I wasn't willing to do was concede the little argument we had gotten into. I had come down on the side of technology. I felt obliged to defend it as best I could.

I looked around. There were the matches I had used to

light the hibachi. I picked them up and pulled one out.

"Produce fire?" I said. "You mean like this?" and I struck a match.

His face fell a bit. The initial pop and flare of the match must have been more impressive than his own little flame. He snuffed his finger as I shook out the match.

"Well," he said, "how about this? If we needed light, I could produce a glowing ball of energy to light our way." A thought must have struck him, because he looked up curiously at the ceiling light fixture.

"But we don't need light," I said, casually moving toward the wall switch. "I have already produced light." I flicked the light off, then on again.

He looked over at me again, frowning. "That giver of light seems to be affixed up there. My ball of light would move around with me. Definitely an improvement, wouldn't you say?"

"Oh," I responded nonchalantly, "why didn't you say you wanted portable light?" I knew Dad kept a flashlight in the drawer of his desk here in case of blackouts. I got it out and shined it in his face. The fellow looked chagrined.

Then his expression brightened. "Well, how about communications?" he asked, "Using a simple spell, I can speak privately with someone I know over a distance of several versts."

I was intrigued over how far a 'verst' was, but I didn't let on. I was on a roll with this unusual game of one-up-man-ship. I reached across the desk and grabbed up an instrument. "Telephone," I said. "With this device, I can talk to anyone, anywhere on the world. Whether I know them or not. Wrong numbers can be fun."

The 'demon' paused. "All these are peaceful things. What if you must fight? I can project small forces of energy which will do serious harm to an opponent up to 20 paces away."

I snorted in amusement. "For fifty bucks I can buy a gun to do the same thing." The 'demon' frowned, looking puzzled, so I continued, "A gun. A Wand of Many Missiles. Range in the hundreds of paces. Infinitely rechargeable. Missiles by the boxful, fifty cents each."

The fellow shrugged, "That's good for one or two foes. If I meet several opponents at once, I can throw an explosive ball of fire."

"Dynamite."

"Ah," he said quickly, "but is it likely to be as powerful as my ball of fire?"

"Well, let me see. The logical extension of dynamite would be the atomic bomb. The first one used in anger killed between 100,000 and 140,000 people and devastated a large city. How does that compare?"

"Yes, impressive," he said, looking sulky. "I cannot compete with such firepower. Let us try another tack, then. Imagine a phantom horse that I could conjure for you, that could run faster than any horse, for up to 12 hours."

I dug into my pocket and held out my car keys. "A car. It moves at least four times the speed of the fastest horse, carries up to six people, and can run continuously for days at a time, with short stops for refueling."

He was looking angry now, which worried me. He said gruffly, "While I am travelling, I can cast a spell to produce a hut to stay in. It gives me a haven of safety for the night, albeit a bit cramped."

I pulled out my wallet and showed him my credit card. "This, plus reservations, gets me a motel room for the night. Big and luxurious, with free entertainment."

He was really starting to look upset. "With my mind, I can lift massive weights . . . "

"Forklift."

"As well as raise myself off the ground . . . "

"Elevator."

"With the right mind controls, I can fly myself through the air."

"Airplane."

He stood there for a few seconds gritting his teeth. "This airplane you mentioned. It is a device, is it?"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't it be better to fly free, then? Without the device? Feel the wind in your hair."

"Oh, I don't know. The airplane would contain another device, called a heater, to keep you comfortably warm. Besides, flying without a radio and an electronic beacon could get you shot down by Air Defense. Definitely would, in some countries."

"All right, how about a spell to detect and locate your enemies?"

"Radar."

"Well," he said, "how about this? If we needed light, I could produce a glowing ball of energy to light our way."

He closed his eyes for a moment, and I could imagine him counting silently to himself. Then his eyes opened wide with a slight jerk of the head. "Wait, I have it! A powerful and useful spell effect, which any device would only get in the way of producing. Invisibility!" He flashed a grin of triumph.

That one had me stumped for a second. Then I snapped my fingers. "You want invisibility, get yourself a good receptionist, and no one would ever get to see you." Further inspiration struck. "Better yet, just dress up as a skid row bum. No one would even notice you. The very essence of invisibility."

He stroked his chin furiously before going on. "Well, I have only one spell effect left to offer, but one you might find hard to duplicate with your so-called devices. I'm talking about attraction and control of people. This should be particularly interesting to a young-looking person such as yourself, as you could use it on persons of the opposite genders."

"I disagree," I said, knowing I was grinning at him. "A position of power and large sums of money would do the same trick. Hell, even a fancy new car would often be enough."

His face took on a sad look, his shoulders slumped. "Then I fear that I cannot help you at all. This 'teknology' you speak of has me overwhelmed."

I wanted to savour my victory, but a thought struck me. There was something much more important at stake here. "Now, don't give up yet. Something I just said gave me an idea. Large sums of money. Can you conjure up large sums of money, turn lead into gold, anything like that?"

He sighed. "Alas, I'm afraid I cannot. If I could, be assured I would have done it for myself ere now. If I were rich, do you think I would be on call like this?" He sighed again, looking away. "You might as well just send me back."

I agreed. After all, everything he said he could do was listed in my magic book. If I could conjure him up, then I could do all the other things, too. Who needed him? If I ever did decide I needed to talk to him again, I could just conjure him once more.

I hoped.

***Gerald Upton** is a North York Ontario writer.*

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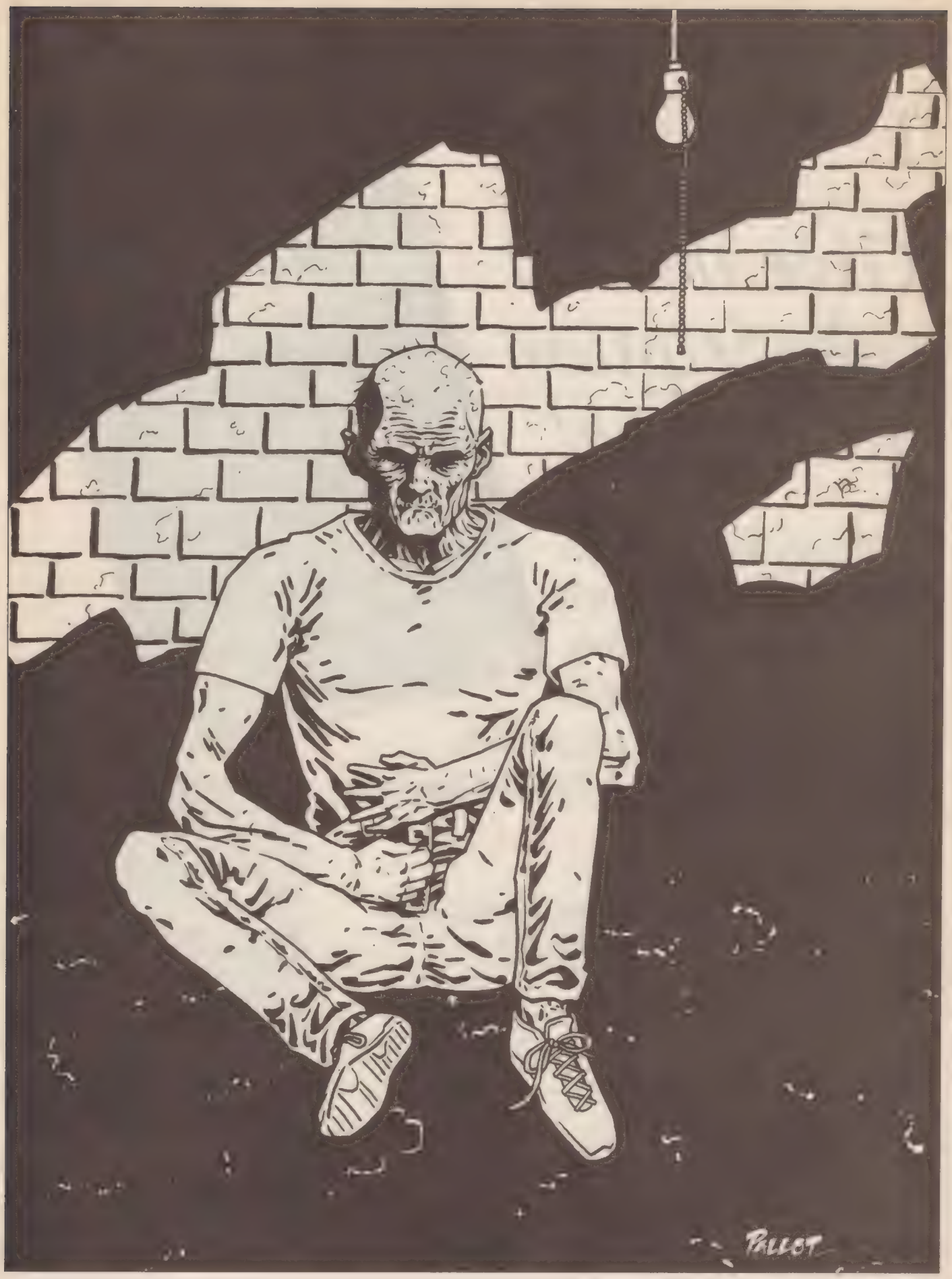

PALLOT

There are questions that are better left unasked

Time Travel in The Age of Aquarius

Written by **MICI GOLD**
Illustrated by **TERRY PALLOT**

The guru lived in the basement of a bombed-out building in Cincinnati.

For several days, Jeanne waited among the urban ruins to see him. Only the guarantees of the people waiting in line ahead of her assured her she had found the right place. The first day she had looked around in dismay. The area seemed so dark, so dangerous. It was foolish of an old lady to come to such a site. How good a guru was he if he had to live in a slum? Yet the rumour of his ability had reached her even up in Canada.

She prayed she was doing the right thing.

After several days of huddling under the meagre shelter of concrete slabs left by the urban holocaust, Jeanne looked up to see the guru's woman standing amid the debris. The woman smiled, revealing missing and broken teeth, and motioned with a large flashlight for Jeanne to follow her.

With all these people coming, they could have cleaned up a little, Jeanne complained to herself as she stumbled over the rubble lying on the darkened stairs. The woman leading her down seemed oblivious to the obstacles. Years of practice overlooking the obvious, Jeanne supposed, then looked closely at the woman as they rounded a landing. Years and years of practice.

And you're so young? she chided herself. There's probably only a handful of people on the whole continent old enough to care about the time period you want to ask about.

At the bottom of the stairs the woman's flashlight revealed mounds of rubbish among the broken cinder blocks and beams. Jeanne stopped to stare.

Then, imagining she heard something scurrying in the shadows, she rushed to catch up with the guru's woman. Hurrying, she tripped over food cartons and reeking garbage bags and ducked belatedly to avoid a cobweb.

The woman had led her to a tiny office not much neater than the hallway outside. A dangling bulb barely illuminated the room.

"Please sit here," The woman gestured to a large plastic box.

Foreigner, Jeanne grunted, hearing the voice. Probably illegal. She lowered herself onto the upturned crate and wondered what kind of vermin lived in the blanket folded on top.

"Henry, we have a guest," the woman said to somebody sitting slumped in the middle of the floor.

Henry? Jeanne felt her eyebrows rise. What kind of name is that for a guru? When she was young, gurus had exotic multisyllabic names that only their devotees could pronounce. They came from mysterious parts of the globe.

With her mouth open, Jeanne peered at the guru. He could have come from anywhere. His skin was so wrinkled, his eyes so sunken, his mouth so toothless and his skin so dirty that she couldn't have decided what race he was if her life depended on it. He wasn't wearing guru's robes, either, but a ratty and unwashed pair of jeans and a T-shirt with a faded logo.

Ironically, spanking new running shoes covered his over-sized feet.

He didn't smell much like a guru either, Jeanne thought, wrinkling her nose. Of

course, after waiting outside for three days, neither do I.

The guru was rocking back and forth, humming tunelessly to himself.

In spite of the woman's announcement, he still seemed unaware that anyone else was in the room.

Jeanne sighed. Apparently the muse of wisdom wasn't very choosy. Or perhaps she was as blind or discombobulated as the guru appeared to be.

"Before you ask your question, you have to give him your gift," the woman reminded her. "What did you bring, please?"

It was fair, Jeanne supposed. After all, even old idiots had to eat. If he could really do what he was supposed to do, then it was worth the better part of her cosy recent government cheque to travel here all the way from Canada and bring him ham biscuits.

The roving vendor upstairs had said that the guru liked ham biscuits. Weren't gurus supposed to be vegetarians? Or live on air, love and good thoughts? This one looked like he hadn't had a thought of any kind in a long, long time.

Now stop that, she told herself as she placed her basket on the floor next to the guru.

He may not have had a thought in a long time, but he knew the scent of ham biscuits when he smelled them. He started to drool visibly and reached unerringly for the food. He shovelled in two before the woman rescued the remainder with a laugh like the one reserved for errant children.

"Now, Henry, we have to save some for later. And you have to help this lady first."

Henry whimpered then calmed as the woman gently patted his shoulder.

Setting the basket aside, she stepped around him to a small stack of crates with a tarp thrown over something on the top. Carefully, the woman pulled the tarp away to reveal a relic.

Jeanne laughed out loud.

She hadn't seen a television set since the turn of the century. Surely that thing didn't still work?

The woman misunderstood her laugh and smiled with pride. With a practiced flick of her wrists she turned the knob and whacked the back at the same time. The screen sizzled and sputtered to life.

Jeanne's laugh died off. She waited expectantly for some image to appear on the screen, but the static continued to hiss.

The woman uncoiled a frayed wire attached to the back of the set and tried to push it into Henry's palm. He cried softly and shook his hands.

"Take the wire, Henry," the woman ordered in a no-nonsense tone.

"You have to take the wire."

Henry looked so sad that Jeanne considered leaving. After all, since Thomas had been dead all this time, it wouldn't really matter if she never saw him again. It wasn't worth hurting this old moron.

"If he doesn't really want to . . ."

The woman shrugged. "Oh, he doesn't mind really. He just hates to work. Take the wire, Henry!"

Still blubbering, Henry finally took the wire and wrapped it around his fist several times.

With a start, Jeanne realized that Henry was holding bare wire. No wonder he didn't want to! Why, it was a marvel that it didn't kill him! All at once, she understood the legend: he held the wire and images from his mind would fill the screen. That's why people came; that's why Jeanne herself had come.

"Are you sure it's okay?"

"Don't worry!" the woman assured her with an airy wave. "He does it all the time."

Well, Jeanne thought, he does seem to be settling down, and if it means I can see Thomas and find out what would have been . . .

"Now ask your question." The woman interrupted her reverie. "And remember: you must think very carefully how you ask. Because Henry doesn't know what you want to know if you don't really know either."

"How much do I need to say?"

"One question. And, you have to hold his hand." The woman lifted the hand that wasn't holding the wire and stretched it toward Jeanne.

Jeanne leaned away; she couldn't help it. She stared in disgust at the drawn, dirty paw with its curved, stained nails. Then, after a few moments to get used to the idea, she took the hand, gingerly, and laid it in her lap. It meant she was that much closer to seeing Thomas.

The hand felt warmer and softer than she expected; almost human. Jeanne looked at the vacant eyes for a moment, then at the barely functioning antique TV and at the ruins of the building housing the guru and his woman.

Am I just a fool? she wondered. Had she gotten so old and lonely that she was reduced to relying on the desperate tricks of the perennially unemployable to satisfy her unfulfilled dreams?

She had risked her health and safety to travel to this abandoned city, wrecked by its own citizens. But she remembered another time when citizens disagreed with their government, the government that had killed Thomas.

Okay, not directly, she admitted to herself, but it amounts to the same thing.

"Ask your question," the woman urged with an edge in her voice.

"Others are waiting."

"Keep watching the screen. It gets better," the woman promised from behind Jeanne. "If it would just show me something I recognized . . ."

"Okay, okay," Jeanne sighed. "I want to know: what would have happened if Thomas had not died in Vietnam."

Suddenly images appeared amid the snow on the screen. As she watched, the images became clearer.

Jeanne leaned closer. Home video, that's what it looked like: a bad home video, with disjointed scenes cutting in on each other. Voices rumbled in the background, just below her diminished hearing.

How was she supposed to learn anything from such a poor picture and sound?

"Keep watching the screen. It gets better," the woman promised from behind Jeanne.

"If it would just show me something I recognized . . ."

Even as she spoke, Jeanne saw it: Thomas's nineteenth birthday. She remembered that.

Her parents had made a barbecue and invited several of his friends; Jeanne had been underfoot, the pest at her brother's party. He hadn't minded much, though. He'd been too worried about

going down to sign up for the army to find her usual antics bothersome.

Tears rolled down Jeanne's cheeks. Never mind that there had never been videos of this event because nobody had video back then; this was what she remembered. Sweet Thomas. How beautiful he had looked. How young and whole.

Wait, who was that? Hastily, Jeanne wiped away the tears. She didn't remember that boy. She thought she remembered all her brother's friends.

Or that girl. Perplexed, she zoomed in for a closer look and gaped at the two newcomers. Someone came up behind her and gave her a shake.

"Quit staring, ninny. Go find something useful to do." Jeanne whirled around at the familiar voice, but instead of the remembered sad smile, she saw a strange sneer.

"What?"

Her brother leaned over to glower into her face. "You heard me! Get lost! This is my last party before college and I don't want you to wreck it!"

He pushed her back toward the house.

She stared at him in surprise. "You aren't going to college," she protested, but her voice sounded weak and silly.

"Says who!" Thomas spun away to catch a frisbee. With a graceful leap, he snagged it in mid-air and snapped it toward someone else even before he landed.

"But what about the war?" she asked of no one in particular.

The strange girl heard her and looked at her and asked. "What war?"

"The war with the North Vietnamese."

"The who?"

Something about the tone in the girl's voice made Jeanne hesitate. "You know, who we're fighting with."

"Oh, you mean the Soviets."

"Well, not directly."

The girl looked confused again. Not difficult, Jeanne thought, when there probably wasn't much sense in that head to start with. What could her brother possibly see in such a shallow person? Thomas had been better than that.

The strange boy turned around at that point. "Oh, hi, Jeannie. Trying to show off again?"

"What?"

Her voice must have hit high C.

Suddenly Thomas was beside her again. "Look, stupid, I told you to get lost. Do I have to call Mom?"

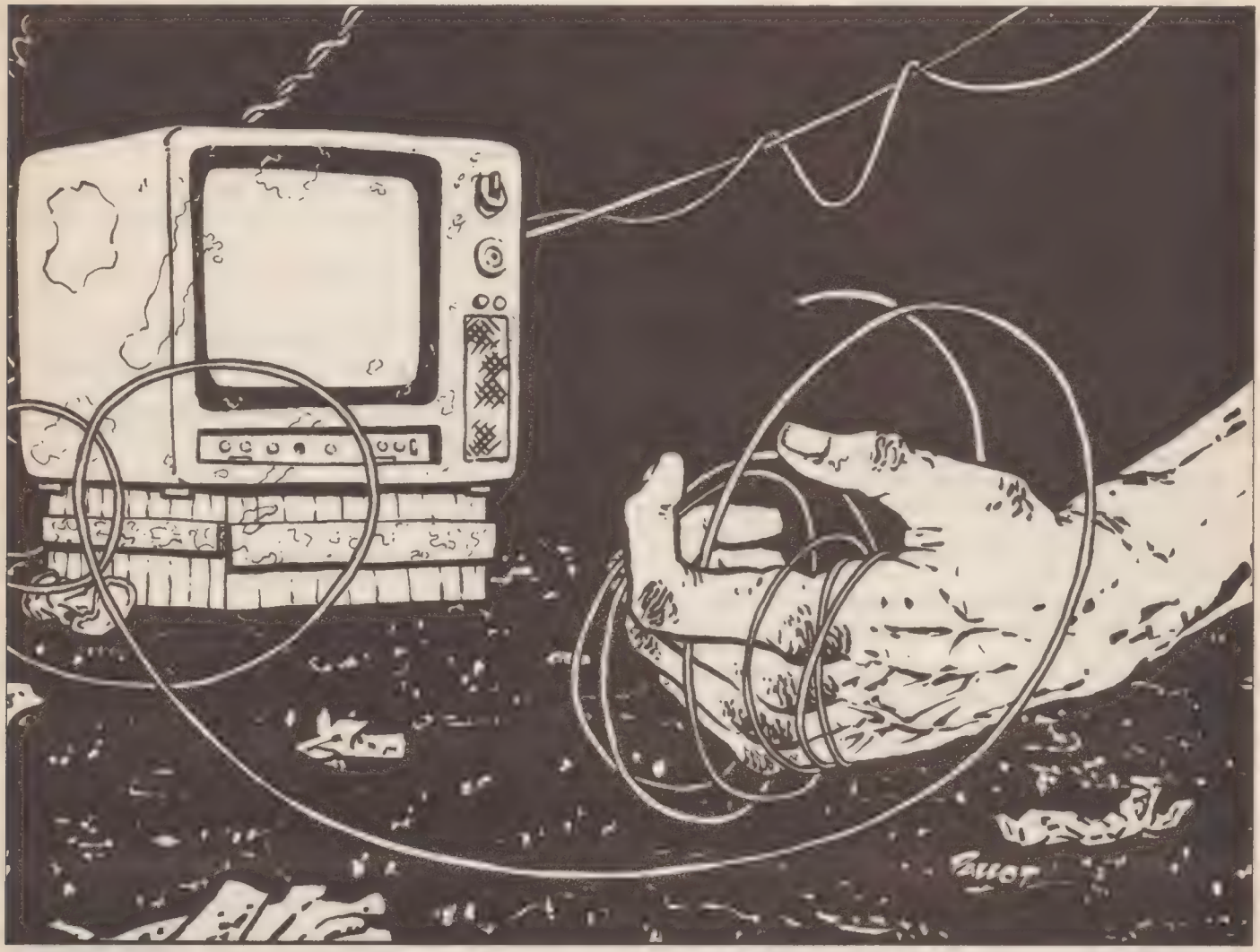
This time the push was quite rough and Jeanne stumbled back and fell on her backside. The guests laughed.

It hurt, but not as much as the disbelief that dear, sweet Thomas would ever do such a thing. Thomas was oblivious to her pain, however; he had walked away with his friends.

This wasn't how she remembered it at all. Sobbing, Jeanne rose and ran into the house. Her mother turned as she rushed into the kitchen wailing about Thomas's behaviour.

"Here, roll the cookies. Good Lord, do I have to do everything?"

Jeanne quit crying and stared at the dough board and rolling pin in disbelief. What was this? Her mom made cookies



only in the winter. She glanced out the window to see snow covering the backyard. "Mom, where's Thomas?"

"He's still at college, honey. Christmas break doesn't start until next week."

Jeanne sighed. Maybe it was worth having a grumpy, unfamiliar Thomas if he got a chance to have a normal life and go to college like his friends had done. She picked up the rolling pin.

"Wait, there's the mail. Would you go bring it in? I'm still getting over my cold."

Jeanne opened the front door onto a beautiful spring day. Mail spilled out of the box. She took the letters to her mom in the living room.

With an unfamiliar grimace, her mother filed through the letters. "Ah, here they are. Let's see if he did any better this time."

Jeanne looked over her mother's shoulder at the report from the college: no A's or B's. Her mother's mouth tightened. Jeanne laid her hand on her mother's shoulder. Her mom patted it. "At least we have one good student in the family. You'd better go finish your homework, Jeannie."

Puzzled, Jeanne trudged up the narrow stairs to her room. Thomas had gotten bad grades in college? He'd done so well in high school. As she closed the door, she overheard a snippet of her mother's phone conversation.

"It's that girl again, George; I know she's giving him that marijuana. I just know it!"

Jeanne sat down at her desk and opened the book. Calculus? She'd never studied calculus. That was a university subject, wasn't it?

"Jeanne, guess what! Mark is here!" Her roommate rushed into the room they shared. "He's waiting downstairs for you. Better hurry!"

Jeanne screamed and screamed. Henry's woman was shaking her. Jeanne, startled, gasped and stared at her in disbelief.

Who? Jeanne looked up to protest and stared at the strange girl and then at the strange, poster-covered dorm room.

"You have to quit studying some time, you know. There's a whole world out there." Her friend pulled her up. "He's waiting!"

Jeanne made her way downstairs to the lobby of the dorm. A young man greeted her with a big smile. Jeanne found herself smiling, too. He was certainly cute, even though she hadn't a clue who he was. "Hi," she said shyly.

He greeted her with a kiss. Jeanne stepped back in surprise to protest such presumptuous behaviour, but he whipped out a small gift box from inside his athletic jacket.

"I couldn't think of a clever way to do this, so . . . here."

She opened it. It was an engagement ring, a perfect fit. At her wedding, Thomas was drunk and obnoxious. She noticed he was losing his hair. She tried to get close to him, to talk, to find out what was troubling him, but her new husband and friends kept drawing her back to dance.

She had little time to worry about Thomas when the baby came; it was hard to concentrate on her research when she didn't get much sleep at night.

Mark needed her, too. She joined the faculty of a small northwestern college and her brother started a small insurance business in New York. He called once to say he'd lost the business and once more to say he'd gotten divorced.

Not until her father's funeral did she get to see Thomas again. He sat in a corner of their parents' living room reading a newspaper and ignoring everybody the whole time that they were receiving guests. Finally Jeanne noticed the headline on the front page: War Imminent.

"Dad was lucky," Thomas joked as he tossed the paper on the coffee table. "He got out just in time."

"Do you think there will actually be a war?" Jeanne asked, awed that she was actually having an adult conversation with her brother.

The familiar sad smile appeared portentously on her brother's lips, and Jeanne's heart missed a few beats. "What else is new, Jeannie? There hasn't been a significant conflict anywhere in the world for thirty-five years. I think we're ripe for it . . . even if no one knows what it's about.

"Nothing ever changes."

The atomic bombs began to fall a few months later. Jeanne's family was spared at first because they lived in a less populous corner of the country.

Her brother's city was the first to go. She learned about it just before the papers ceased production. She cried for two days, knowing she had lost him again. Then her son became sick because of failing sanitation and she had to take him to a doctor in the state capital. Another round of bombardment destroyed most of the city. The hospital shook and fell in on her.

Jeanne screamed and screamed.

Henry's woman was shaking her. Jeanne, startled, gasped and stared at her in disbelief.

Where was she? Was this bombed-out relic the hospital?

Where was her son? Wait, she didn't have a son. And she'd never had a husband or a Ph.D. in chemistry. She'd moved to Canada to protest the war.

And Thomas had died seventy-five years ago in Vietnam. Hadn't he? Jeanne blinked at the flickering bulb.

Nearby, a TV hissed but there were no pictures on it.

"Is it over?" Jeanne whispered.

"Apparently," the woman said and turned to attend to Henry, who was whimpering again. She unwound the wire from the guru's trembling hand.

"What happened?"

"You stared at a blank TV screen for ten minutes. Your time is up, please." She straightened and held out her hand to help Jeanne up.

"But not yet! I don't understand what happened. How much of it was real?"

"Only one question per person. Unless you want to go to the end of the line and wait again. Other people are before you."

She took Jeanne's hand and elbow and Jeanne found herself standing and walking out.

"Wait! Is what I saw definitely what would have happened? Couldn't it have been some other way? How do I know what the guru showed me is really the truth?"

The woman paused and sighed. Probably she had heard these questions many times before.

"Who knows?"

Exhausted and feeling her age, Jeanne leaned on the woman and allowed herself to be escorted back through the ruined basement and up the decaying stairs.

Outside in the twilight, other people waited as she had until her turn had come: old and young, hopeful and desperate, each clutching an offering to the guru of foolish dreams.

Mici Gold *has written interviews fo* Sol Rising, *the newsletter of the Meril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy, and for Transversions. A previous short story appeared in Wordscapes, the anthology of the Canadian Authors Association. She lives in Toronto.*

Horror comes easy for writer

By
CHRIS KREJLGAARD

Photo by JEL

Like other notable horror writers, like Stephen King, Edo van Belkom deals with personal fears in his short stories and novels.

Edo van Belkom lives in a world filled with horror.

A dank, dark, putrid, rat-infested world.

A world filled with the unexpected, the unexplained and of unspeakable inhuman acts.

No, he isn't a used car salesman. And in person, he doesn't fit the image of someone who has become a bit of a celebrity in horror fiction circles.

In the span of a few years, van Belkom has become a burgeoning force on the Canadian literary scene.

He has displayed a gift for horror writing. And a prodigious gift at that.

Since his first sale in 1990, van Belkom has sold more than 90 short stories to publications on both sides of the border.

He has already published his first novel, while a pair of others — Lord Soth and Mister Magick are scheduled for publication next year.

His first novel, Wyrm Wolf, is based on White Wolf's role-playing game Werewolf: The Apocalypse.

Contracted to write a book based on such a game can be a daunting task — especially in terms of the reference materials that are provided to the author.

"The publishers said 'just take what you need to make an effective story and forget about the rest'," van Belkom explains. "And that is important to do because some game-based fiction reads as being just some role-playing scenario that people play."

Wyrm Wolf demonstrates van Belkom's knack for bringing horror to the everyday world.

Van Belkom, who holds a degree in creative writing from York University said that half way through university, "I realized that I wasn't going to earn any money as a (fiction) writer when I got out, so I went to the university newspaper, the Excalibur, and I spent more time in that office over the next two years, than I did in class."

But it was time well-spent.

"At least when I got out, I had some skill as a writer, or as a reporter, and I became a newspaper reporter as a way of continuing my writing," he says.

After leaving York, van Belkom worked as a crime and sports reporter in Cambridge in southwest Ontario and in Brampton outside of Toronto.

Besides providing an income while he worked on his fiction, these jobs also helped van Belkom hone another skill essential for short story writing — the knack for being concise.

"I think that publishers like my work because I'm disciplined, I start and complete my work on time — I've never missed a deadline. And the fact that I get to the point, there's not a lot of extra stuff in my writing," he says.

"Someone said that you have to write one million words of crap before you write anything good. I was lucky to write a million words of crap at newspapers.

"When I decided that I wanted to write stories I already had the ability to put words together, what I had to learn was storytelling, characterization and plot," he says. "But at least I was able to put the words together."

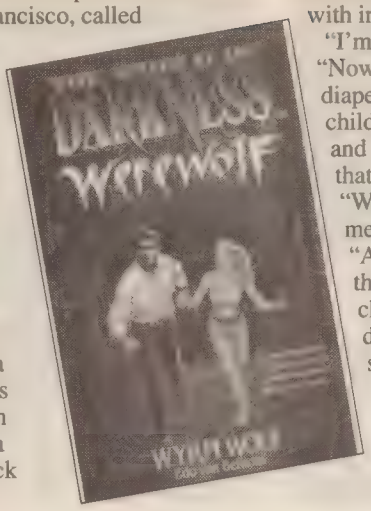
But it is his skills for observation that shine through in Wyrm Wolf.

It is a gift that he first learned from his father.

"I remember my father taking me to a shopping mall, we'd get an ice cream and we'd just sit there and I'd ask him what we were doing and he'd say "We're watching all the people going by," van Belkom explains. "Because of this I became very observant of the world around me at an early age. And I notice things that other people don't."

And this gift for observation shows through in the details he brings to the work.

Taking place in an impoverished section of San Francisco, called the Tenderloin, the story focuses on the attempts of Father Wendel Oldman to stop a renegade werewolf from killing his parishioners.



It helps that Father Oldman is also a werewolf, a wolf in shepherd's clothing, or as van Belkom puts it, "a priest who can kick butt."

Unlike Larry Talbot, Father Oldman and the renegade garou, Wingnut, are not alone. There are groups of werewolves, each with their own leaders, their own rituals and their own taboos.

Van Belkom manages to capture a real sense of the downtrodden world — a place where men living in refrigerator cartons are easy targets for the supernatural.

It is a perfect blending of reality and fiction — the true mark of good horror writing. It is not a cumbersome task for the reader to dispel his or her belief while turning the pages.

"I seem to write best when I write about the real world around us," he says.

In Wyrm Wolf, the characters and the locales all have the right *feel* to them, and that comes from an attention to detail — details likely fleshed out by his observations of the city around him.

It is easy to imagine battles between garous or that homeless people are being killed by monsters — after all, thugs that prey on the homeless are little better than the monster portrayed in van Belkom's book.

And the process where someone becomes a monster is at the heart of van Belkom's thoughts and approach toward writing.

During the interview, van Belkom displayed an easy-going and humorous attitude toward his profession. But his face takes on a serious facade as he leans forward.

"Some of the best work I have done is a treatment of my own fears," he says, adding that a number of his stories include trucks and old people.

"So I thought about it and realized that I may have a fear of large, speeding trucks and of growing old without accomplishing what I set out to do."

But there is an even darker fear that van Belkom says he has only recently dealt with in an as-yet unsold story.

"I'm a recent father," he says sternly. "Now I tend to him a lot, I change his diapers. You look at people who are child abusers, and you think of them and you wonder what is it about them, that makes them that way.

"What's different about that guy than me.

"And I'm changing my son, and I'm thinking 'What if one time when I'm changing that diaper, that I look down and see his genitals and suddenly I became turned on by it?'

"No warning, nothing whatsoever. And that's a fear that I had for a long time, because you don't know about yourself until you're in that situation."

Van Belkom points out that the story was his way of dealing with this particular fear.

"It was very cathartic for me," he adds.

Such fears are the things of true horror — the transformation of a rational person into an unthinking, uncaring monster.

"Dealing with a personal fear in such a way that makes a good story is the best thing a horror writer can do," he notes. "Stephen King has a list of his ten biggest fears and he has written stories that have dealt with all those fears.

"I think some of the best horror I have done, has some of my personal fears at its roots."

What makes van Belkom's grasp of the genre even more admirable is his admission that he entered the field with no background in it.

"I tried science fiction, because the people I was with were all aspirant science fiction writers and that's what I thought I wanted to do," he explains. "I enjoyed it, but I found that I really didn't have a head for science fiction.

"I can write it, but it's not my favorite thing."

Van Belkom adds that as he continued along in his writing career he discovered that he was good at horror, "But I'm not sure why."

But while he is good at writing horror stories, van Belkom is trying his hand at writing fantasy.

"I'm enjoying it," he says, but quickly cautions that there's "nothing cute about it. It's dark and dirty and filled with lots of evil characters that win more times."

In order to meet deadlines, journalists become adept at forming the framework for stories in their head before even touching a

> The knack for observing the minute details of the world shines through in Wyrm Wolf

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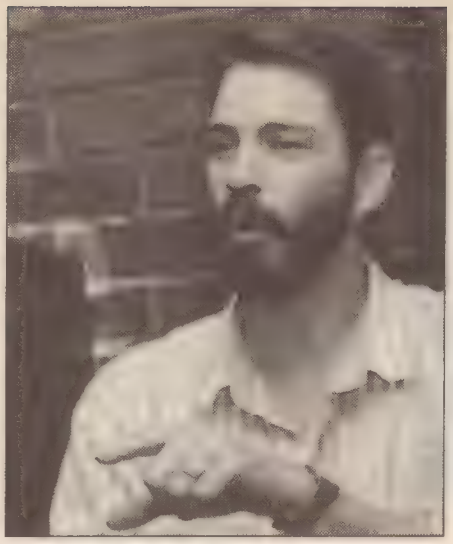
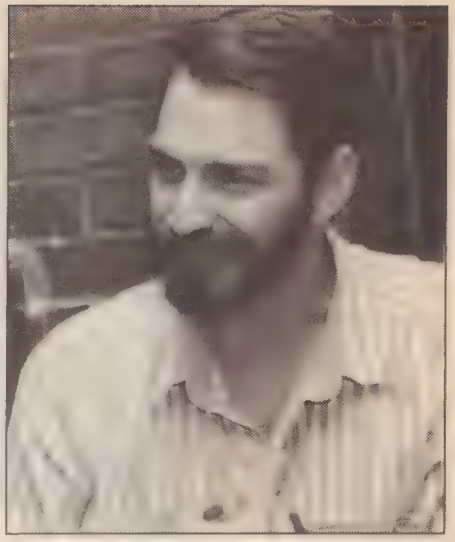




keyboard. So it is no surprise that van Belkom performs the same feat when he begins working on a story or book.

"It comes full blown into my head," he smiles. "When you go through life making a living as a writer, you tend to look at things a little differently and as something that can be used in fiction."

Since he had little background in science fiction or horror stories when he decided to try his hand at writing in the genres, van Belkom began to read other authors to get a feel for the subject matter.

Like any good researcher, van Belkom went to the original source when he decided to get a feel for the genre of horror.

"I stayed away from Stephen King, because I knew he had been inspired by a generation before him," van Belkom explains. "He was a product of the first generation of writers."

"So I read Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury and Richard Mattison.

"And I thought that's the kind of stories I want to write. Good stories, not stream of consciousness, not atmospheric. Not anything like that.

"The thing about those writers is that you've got good stories first. Plots that anyone can read and follow.

"And I tried to emulate these writers and tell a good story and little by little I think I've done that and now I'm starting to find my own style."

PARSEC **Book Reviews**

Duncan brings new twist to clichè

There is some ingredients that always make for a good fantasy novel.

A group of characters with all sorts of backgrounds, abilities and weakness thrown together on the pursuit of a quest.

J.R.R. Tolkien, Piers Anthony and David Eddings are just a few of the authors that have had success with that kind of formula.

David Duncan has adopted a similar storyline with his own unique twists in The Cursed (Ballantine).

Instead of Elves, dwarves, trolls and more invading the lives of human, Duncan's world has humans who have been cursed with special abilities. But for all the good some abilities bring there is plenty of bad — especially for the cursed individual.

There are six types of Cursed. Shoolscaths, Ivielscaths, Moulscaths, Awailscaths, Ogoalscaths, Jaulscaths and Poulscaths.

Shoolscaths are seers, although they know the future their brain immediately erases the past. So a Shoolscath has no idea where he has been or what he has done.

An Ivielscath is a healer, but without a great deal of control, so an Ivielscath could pass on sickness to others just as easily.

One of the more interesting ones are the Awailscaths who can constantly change their appearance, meaning that they could be a good-looking man one day and an ugly woman the next. If the two were every separated, within days they would never be able to find the other, the change is so complete.

Moulscaths could cause the others to feel great passion but could never feel any emotion themselves.

And so on . . .

All of the cursed became outcasts and under the laws of the land it is illegal to give them shelter.

There are of course people that do give them shelter and therein lies the tale.

The story begins with a widowed innkeeper who is keeping an Ivielscath hidden away. She then meets with a large farming family who are largely indifferent to the cursed.

Gradually, more and more cursed join the group until the contingent could have an impact on an imminent war.

All in all, the book is an enjoyable one, with Duncan doing an excellent job of exploring the possibilities with The Cursed.

One fault early in the book was the jumping back and forth to several characters before the readers had even got to know one.

It meant flipping back pages a number of times to keep clear which faction the individuals were associated with.

Once the groups were finally merged and on a quest to find other cursed, the

book began to flow more easily.

But that would hardly deter most fantasy fans who can handle more races, names, gods and demi-gods than other people.

The Cursed does intrigue the reader from the beginning and it helps if there is time to read 100 pages at a clip.

Although he follows a clichè formula with The Cursed, Duncan does put in enough of his own twists to consider the novel unique.

— Brian Belfry

❑❑❑

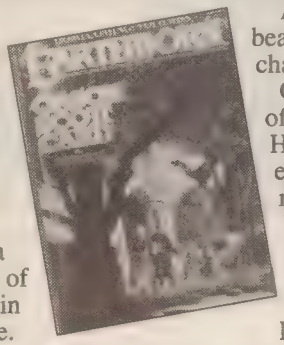
I am not a fan of multi-book epics, it must be my limited attention span. But I figure if the works of Homer can fit in a single paperback, then so should any other work that purports to be an epic — a term that has been overused of late.

There are exceptions to this rule, of course.

Timothy Zahn's Star Wars trilogy comes to mind, but that was more for the subject matter than any real affinity for the storyline.

Lately, there have been three other exceptions to the rule. Chief among them is Orson Scott Card's Homecoming Saga.

Card is one of the masters of our time — you'd have to be to get me to read five volumes of anything. And he did.



His Homecoming Saga, is a contemporary-era Iliad.

During the course of the first four volumes Card spins a tale that sees a group of pioneers leave Earth in search of a new home. They find it on a planet called Harmony — a planet protected by a computer intelligence known as the Oversoul.

These pioneers and their descendants remained on Harmony for eons, until a catastrophe forces them to return to Earth.

But after forty million years, Earth is a little different than when the original pioneers left. It is now inhabited by the Diggers and the Angels — races that live underground and in the treetops respectively.

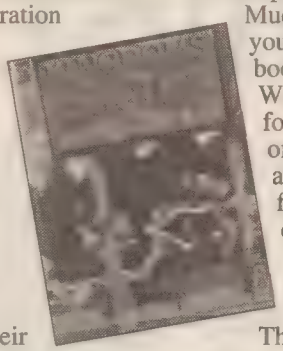
They aren't exactly fond of the newcomers. And the two brothers who battled during the voyage back to Earth have managed to bring their conflict to the planet.

All this threatens to keep the Oversoul from attaining the help it needs to find the Keeper of the Earth so that a programming flaw can be corrected.

The Oversoul's last hope is Shedemei now dons the Cloak of the Starmaster and leaves the Basilica to find the Starmaster and try to bring peace to Earth.

Earthborn (Tor) is filled with allegorical references to religion — especially given the nigh god-like powers of the Oversoul.

But on a more basic level, Card can be seen drawing his inspiration from the modern-day world.



The Diggers can easily be seen as the destitute and the homeless — not only because of their place of existence on Earth, but also because of their inherent suspicion of the Angels and the humans. The Angels because of their stature among the treetops can be seen as the corporate and political elite, while the human visitors from the stars are viewed as a threat to the status quo and must be destroyed or at the very least kept in abeyance.

And, of course, Shedemei and the Basilica can easily be viewed as the church and its leadership trying to find an answer to its own questions amongst role conflict and pettiness of the world.

And all of this is wrapped in a beautifully detailed and wonderfully characterized package.

Card's work is the very best example of science fiction can and should be. He manages to spin a tale that not only entertains the reader, but also — if the reader is savvy enough — offers a lesson to be learned.

And that puts Card in a class by himself.

❑❑❑

In much the same vein as Earthborn, Kingdoms of the Night, attempts to draw a parallel between the fantasy world of Orissa and the world around us and the personal conflict many of us feel as we grow older.

The third in the Anteros series, in Kingdoms of the Night (Random House), former adventure Amalric Antero has lived an idyllic life in Orissa. But recently his wife has died, his sister has gone missing and his son is a disappointment.

In a dream he learns that he had not found the fabled Far Kingdoms as he thought he and his partner had believed. In the dream, he is told the the real Far Kingdoms have yet to be discovered.

And only their discovery will save Orissa.

Amalaric comes to the realization that Orissa has not been living in a Golden Age as its populace (and himself) had believed. In fact, evil forces were threatening the city and all the discoveries he and his sister had made earlier in their lives.

While on a lesser scale than Earthborn, Allan Cole and Chris Bunch still effectively manage to bring the human condition into clear focus.

Like many of us, Amalaric is feeling the effects of time on himself and his accomplishments.

Much of what he had done in his younger days — as detailed in the books The Far Kingdoms and The Warriors Tale — has been forgotten and relegated to the stuff of legends. His closest confidants and friends are now gone and his family has not lived up to his expectations.

Take away the fantasy elements and you have the makings of a movie of the week.

This is not to take away from the story. It is a good one that is well-textured and the two collaborators managed to bring their characters to life for the readers — as opposed to characters who merely lie flat on the page.

Like its predecessors, Kingdoms of the Knight is a wonderful tale that demands the reader's full attention — and deserves it.

❑❑❑

The Halfblood Chronicles take another step forward with Elvenblood (Tor).

A sequel to Elvenbane, authors Andre Norton and Mercedes Lackey maintain the energy and the excitement that was present in the first part of series.

In the sequel, Shana attempts to stir halfbloods and dragons to battle the all-powerful elven lords. She discovers a band of human nomads who are immune to the effects of magic and utilize a metal that is impervious to magic and physical strength (teflon?).

The only problem is that the nomads have taken her captive and imprisoned her with the metal.

But if she can swing them to her side, the balance of power would clearly shift against the elven lords and toward the masses who have suffered under the lords' rule.

The two veteran authors provide a seamless tale that continues the reader's enjoyment from the first book.

It is enjoyment gained from an entertaining, imaginative story with well-thought out characters and plot.

If there is a weakness in the book, it is the fact that the reader has to wait for a third installment.

Although, upon reflection, such a condition is the strength of a good series.

— Lars Johanson

The first vampire

Ahead of its time, Nosferatu set the tone for all the Dracula movies that followed

By
CHRIS KREJLGAARD

Photo courtesy of Aitken Film Archives

On board ship, Count Orlock rises from the hold and closes in on his final victims.

To truly appreciate vampire films, you have to view Nosferatu. Because all the myriad of Dracula movies that have made it to the screen during the years have their basis in this 1922 German masterpiece.

In order to avoid paying Bram Stoker's estate for use of the Dracula story, the producers changed the names and moved the story's setting from London to Germany.

Thankfully, the court order the estate received in England that ordered the film company to destroy all prints of the movie was unenforceable in Germany. So the masterpiece was not lost for all time.

In the film, like Bram Stoker's novel of 25 years before, a clerk is sent to a castle in Transylvania to conduct business with a mysterious count. In the movie the count's name is Orlock (played by Max Schreck — whose last name appropriately enough means "fright" in German).

As Hutter the clerk nears the castle nestled in some unnamed corner of the Carpathian Mountains, he is warned by terrified villagers that demons and other evil await him if he continues onward.

Even though Hutter notices that animals are skittish during the evening and that there is a hyena lurking near the horses (it's better if you don't ask what a hyena is doing in Europe), he presses on to Orlock's castle.

When he is almost there his carriage men refuse to take him the final distance, on foot he crosses a small bridge and is greeted by a ghostly carriage and its sinister coachman.

While at the castle, he meets Count Orlock. The count is mis-shapened, with a large bald head, pointed ears, searing eyes and claw-like fingers. He is the exact opposite of the suave count portrayed a decade later with such relish by Bela Lugosi.

Through a bit of luck, Hutter is spared the full might of Orlock's powers. But he is nonetheless left behind as the count heads for the German village of Bremen — Hutter's home and the place where his bride, Ellen, awaits his return. The count had glimpsed a picture of Ellen and was smitten — or as smitten as vampires can be.

Orlock and Hutter race to the town, Orlock by sea and Hutter by land.

And like the movie that follows in 1930s, Orlock takes up residence near Hutter's home and seduces Ellen.

But the sun comes up and Orlock is caught in the open.

Among the elements altered to Stoker's estate, were the inclusion of Bremen and the clerk's name was changed from Jonathan Harker and Mina became Ellen.

But the theme of the story and the movie

Photo courtesy of Aitken Film Archives

With the dawn, Ellen's sacrifice had not been for naught. Count Orlock is destroyed by the dawn.

remain the same — vampire finds girl, vampire loses girl and vampire bites the dust at the end.

As Leonard Wolfe notes in his book, Horror a Connoisseur's Guide to Literature and Film, the film creates a strange love triangle between Hutter, Orlock and Ellen.

Both men desire her, but the strange forbidden love with Orlock tempts and arouses Ellen.

It is a theme that has been played out in numerous Dracula incarnations, most recently Francis Ford Coppola's version of the Prince of Darkness.

> Like some of its followers the vampire is part of a complex love triangle

But unlike the Coppola work, Ellen (Mina) is slightly more virtuous in Nosferatu.

In the Coppola work, Mina cannot help but be drawn to the danger and the unbridled passion offered by Dracula. She even meets him for drinks.

But in Nosferatu, Ellen sacrifices herself to save her husband and the town from the plague brought to Bremen by the appearance of Orlock the vampire.

She realizes that Orlock would be destroyed if he is exposed to sunlight. So she sacrifices herself to him — allowing him to indulge in his demonic whims until it is too late for him to return to the safety of his coffin.

When the sun rises, Orlock is doomed and with his death, his castle in the Carpathian Mountains collapses upon itself.

A rooster crow marks the dawning of a new day, a new beginning after the tragedy and darkness of the previous night.

But beyond the story is it's special effects.

While clumsy and prehistoric by today's computerized and miniaturized standards, Nosferatu marked the pinnacle of horror films during the silent era. Director Friedrich Wilheim Murnau's use of stop action is inspired.

This is particularly true in the scene where Hutter crosses the bridge near Orlock's castle.

Murnau uses this technique on the approaching horse and carriage. By using stop-action, the director is able to give the impression that the carriage is somewhat out of normal time and that Hutter has entered another world — a world in which our laws do not apply.

Even though the herky-jerky motion of the carriage is a little amateurish, in the context of the movie and the time it was filmed, it is an effective scene.

Murnau also utilized a number of other techniques, such as the use of negative film — which reverses the black and white on the screen, which heightened the audience's fear by creating an unworldly quality to the film.

One scene that demonstrates this quality comes during Orlock's ocean voyage to Bremen.

During the voyage, crew members take ill and die. Suddenly the ghastly apparition of the count appears over his coffin shortly before he claims the life of a stricken crewman.

It's not long before only the captain and the first mate remain.

The mate, in a fit of fear or anger (it's hard to tell which) attacks the coffins with an axe.

But the lid of Orlock's coffin flings open and the prone vampire swings upward and takes the lives of the two remaining crewmen.

Making the movie even more awe-inspiring was the fact that at the time of filming Germany was hardly awash in money. Movies ranked low in terms of investments, so it was filmed on a bare-bones budget.

But if there was ever a case where a director was too far ahead of his time, this would be it.

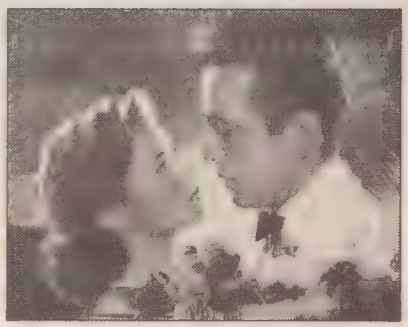
At the time of the movie's release, critics gave it mixed reviews.

They were puzzled by Murnau's camera techniques and special effects wizardry — and rightfully so.

It was, after all, the first time such effects were utilized in a single film. And at the time, it was likely quite a daunting task for audiences to appreciate.

But the perspective of time has made the task easier for modern viewers.

HOLLYWOOD CANTEEN



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Final Unity a journey to take

Think you can run tactical better than Worf or engineering better than Geordi?
Then try Star Trek The Next Generation — A Final Unity

By
GREG VAILLANCOURT

"This is captain Jean-Luc Picard of the U.S.S. Starship Enterprise, Prepare to be blown away!"

And so begins your voyage on the quest to discover the truth in the epic game "Star Trek The Next Generation - A Final Unity."

It seems strange to me, as most of the world has watched the Next Generation series over the years, that there is a remarkable resemblance between the different species.

Most of the character races have distinct similarities.

Haven't you wondered why it is that the races share so many traits when they live worlds or entire star systems apart?

Anyway, the game gives the impression it is all due to a once magnificent race called the Chodak.

To tell you any more of the plot would spoil the game, so I will continue with the voyage into space (hey call me Q).

You begin this game in the role of Captain Jean-Luc Picard in the Neutral Zone doing a routine patrol.

Out of nowhere comes a Garidian ship fleeing from Romulan space with Romulans in hot pursuit. The ship's

fleeing crew tells the story of an ancient and magnificent people which sparks your curiosity and urges you forward to discover the truth.

The game can be played in any of three skill levels — Ensign, Lieutenant or Captain.

Some fans who think they can run tactical better than Worf can test their skill and for those that think Geordi isn't as qualified as they are, can take a chance at engineering.

This allows for novice as well as experts to play. The increasing skill levels allow the user to master everything from the areas of astronavigation, to tactical, to engineering to picking the away teams and their gear.

Different areas of interest can be very in-depth.

Picking your destinations is so detailed that you can venture to black holes, Romulan space or the Neutral Zone — all planet by planet or by star system.

I can picture Worf grunting "Captain, are we there yet?"

There is only one problem. The game is so linear you do not get a chance to randomly explore any planet outside of the plot line and if you are looking for a habitable planet to communicate with other species; you're out of luck. There is only one in the game that is outside of the plot.

Once you have your course down you can go to engineering where everything about the ship's power and the distribution of it is there for you to try to master.

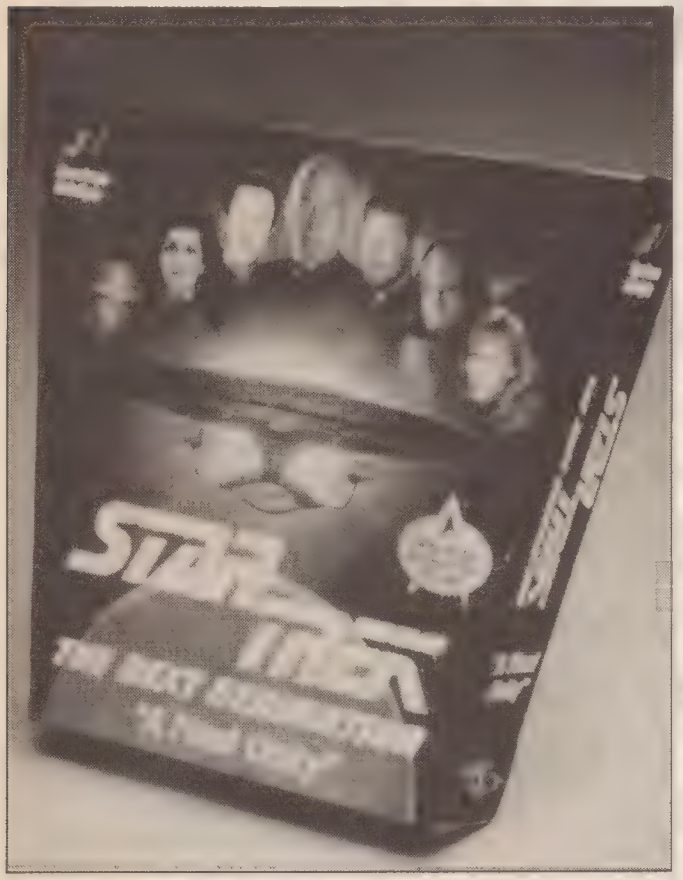
On any voyage your ship is bound to encounter a hostile vessel which will require your tactical skills. You can try any number of manoeuvres and have six views of each vehicle to choose from for watching the misses and hits.

If battle is too much for you then you can let Worf handle it. If you are losing badly don't expect Worf to say something like "Captain, I am NOT a merry man" (from the Qpid episode).

Presuming you make it through the battles and keep the ship in working order, you will be going from scene to scene speaking with beings at every stop in a pick a dialogue format to advance the plot situation.

Most of the time the result is a transport down to the planet surface with the appropriate crew and gear. Away team missions are the highlight of the game.

The game has some very nice digitally-rendered graphics representing the crew of the Enterprise and what seems like cartoon-style graphics of



If there is one flaw in the game, it's that it's too linear. But the great quest that Picard and company are on far overshadows that glitch.

SIDE EFFECTS

❑ Amtex Software Corporation and Corel Corporation have entered into a deal that will see Amtex develop new CD-Rom products for Corel's new CD HOME product line.

Amtex will develop three titles for the new product line.

One, The Bungalo Boys Big Fish Wish, will use animation to give users the thrill of trying to catch Mighty Millie. The company will also develop software that will allow users to visit the Great Pyramid, the Sphinx and the pyramids of Menkura and Kephra, as well as a role-playing game that allows users to unravel the origin of humanity.

❑ Working Designs of Redding, CA., have unveiled LUNAR: Eternal Blue for SEGA-CD.

The sequel to LUNAR: The Silver Blue, contains 90 minutes of dialogue, more than 50 minutes of cartoon-quality animation and more than 60 hours of game play. The game also features two original theme songs, as well as 50 background music themes which correspond to the various towns, cities or dungeons that players venture through.

In addition, the game also features a side perspective during battle sequences, a move that company officials say will give players a better view of the action the weapons and spell animations have improved over the original.

❑ Want to give your living room that feeling you could only get being on the Enterprise's bridge? Then perhaps the Star Trek Universal Remote is for you. The remote, which looks like a Type 2 phaser, can control almost every TV, VCR and cable box. It also provides the prerequisite lights and noises to complete the effect. Further information can be obtained by calling (513) 860-3397.

To SUBSCRIBE SEE PAGE 47

everything else (because it is seen from a distance).

Since the away team missions represent such huge areas, the cartoonish graphics can be accepted. These missions are designed so that as you follow a path through space stopping at different places, you are forced to go on away missions.

Mysteriously you complete quests and pick up objects that just happen to be needed to solve the overall quest.

When you land, your crew wanders around the planet.

Since the characters each have different skills, you will want to try each character in every situation, going with the one you think is best from watching the television show. Speaking of which, you'll find that Data never shuts up, whereas Troi seems out of place in this game. She barely has anything to say.

Depending on how well you do on your away missions, you can contact Starfleet when you beam back onboard the Enterprise to get an evaluation of your work ground side.

I found this was not the epic that it was hyped to be. This game is almost exactly like watching one of the television episodes with a little bit of interaction from the user. It is simply the first in a series of adventure games (like a good book that you read once and then move on) and can not be expected to fulfil your interest in flying around the galaxy finding all kinds of alien species with the occasional stop off at Earth to "do lunch."

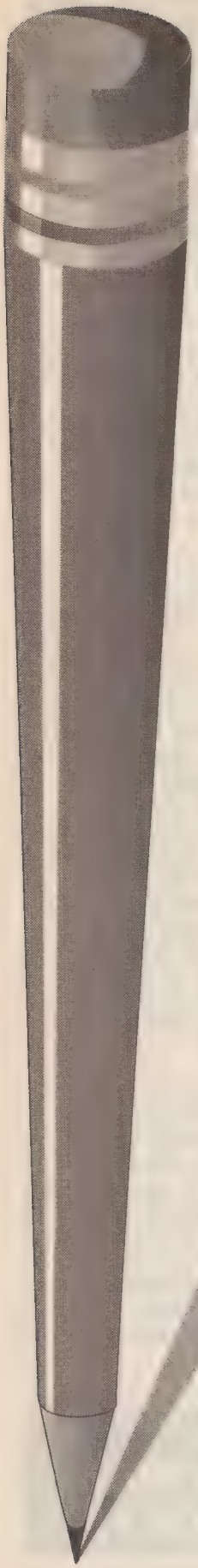
So for those interested in beginning a great quest, prepare to be beamed aboard!

Star Trek The Next Generation - A Final Unity requires a 486DX-33 with twenty megabytes of hard drive space, eight MB ram, double speed CD-rom drive, DOS 5.0, SVGA (with 512K video ram), mouse and a Soundblaster or compatible sound card.

Web word

James Cameron's new movie Strange Days is scheduled to reach theatres during October. As part of the release, 20th Century Fox has announced that the movie will have its own web site. Computer users can find it at:

http://www.strangedays.com



Writers & Artists WANTED

Parsec is looking for writers to provide fiction and non-fiction stories for future issues. Writer's guidelines are available by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to The editor: Parsec, Unit G Suite 108, 1942 Regent St., Sudbury, Ontario, P3E 3Z9.

If you already have a story idea send us a proposal detailing the subject of either the story or interview.

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Conventions

October 20-22
Contradiction Fifteen: Days Inn Fallsview, Niagara Falls, N.Y. Scheduled guests: Karen Joy Fowler, Rick Hautala and Hal Clement. $21 until Sept. 25 or $25 at door. Information: P.O. Box 100, Bridge Station, Niagara Falls, N.Y., 14305.

October 27-29
Concinnity '95: Comfort Inn, Kanata, Ont. Scheduled guest: Larry Stewart. $20 until Sept. 30 or $25 at door. Information: 36076-72 Robertson Road, Nepean, Ont., K2H 5Y8; (613) 831-7129; ak221@Freenet.Carleton.CA.

Primedia: Ramada Hotel 400/401, Toronto, Ont. Scheduled guest: Spider and Jeanne Robinson, Nigel Bennett. $25 until Sept. 30 or $35 at the door. Information: 114-22 Tinder Crescent, Toronto, Ont., M4A 1L6; (905) 820-3844.

January 20-21
Pandemonium XIII: Ryerson Hub Cafeteria, Toronto, Ont. Information: Polar Bear Games, 118 Roncesvalle Ave. #34, Toronto, Ont., M6R 2K8.

March 1-3
Starbase Endeavor: Royal Connaught Howard Johnson Plaza-Hotel, Hamilton, Ont. Scheduled guests: Robert Beltran, Roxann Biggs-Dawson. Pre-registration by Dec. 31: weekend pass $35, Saturday $25, Friday/Sunday $20, reception with the stars $25, make-up seminar $20 and Forever Knight dance $10. Information call: (905) 572-9735.

March 15-17
Odyssey Trek 3 '96: Skyline Brock Hotel, Niagara Falls. Scheduled guests: Ethan Phillips, Deborah Duchene. One-day pass $20 & three-day pass $38 until Feb. 15 or $22/$42 at door. Information: 10 Highgate Dr., Unit #13, Stoney Creek, Ont., L8J 3P7; (905) 573-2187 or BHAGEY@HOOK UP.NET.

March 21-23
Con*cept 96: Holiday Inn Crown Plaza Metro Centre, Montreal, PQ. Scheduled guest: Terry Prattchet, Joel Chapetier. Pre-registration: $24 before March 1, or $29 at the door. Information:P.O. Box 405, Station H, Montreal, PQ., H3G 2L1.

March 29-31
Prisoners of the Knight: Holiday Inn Yorkdale, Toronto, Ont. Scheduled guests: Nancy Baker, Sandi Ross, Larry Stewart. Pre-registration until Nov. 1, weekend pass $30. Information: (416) 925-9020.

April 13-14
Maritime Science Fiction Festival: Delta Barrington Hotel, Halifax, N.S. Scheduled guests: Majel Barrett Roddenberry, Robert O'Reilly, Robin Curtis, Robert Llewellyn. Pre-registration is $45 or day passes are $25 at the door; family day pass, $75. Information: 1-800-454-5548.

April 26-28
Fleet Academy North: Holiday Inn Yorkdale, Toronto, Ont. Scheduled guest: D.C. Fontana, Bjo Trimble. $35. Information: SASE to FAN c/o Georgina Miles, 26 Doddington Dr., Etobicoke, Ont., M8Y 1S4, (416) 588-3817, bru@io.org or http://www.io.org/~bru/.

May 17-20
CanCon '96: Tailsman Hotel, Ottawa, Ont. Scheduled guest: Robert Charles Wilson, Charles de Lint, Robert Sawyer. $20 in advance, $30 at door. Information: P.O. Box 5752, Merivale Depot, Nepean, Ont. K2C 3M1, (613) 738-1012, cancon@achilles.net, or http://www.achilles.net/~cancon/cancon.html.

June 7-9
Ad*Adstra 16: Yorkdale Holiday Inn, Toronto, Ont. Scheduled guest: David Hartwell. $25 pre-registration or $35 at door. Information: P.O. Box 7276, Station A, Toronto, Ont., M5W 1X9.

July 19-21
Con-Version XIII: Glenmore Inn, Calgary, Alta. Scheduled guest: Mel Gilden.

August 4-6
Toronto Trek 10: Regal Constellation Hotel, Toronto, Ont. Scheduled guest: Robert Picardo. Information: Suite 0116, Box 187, 65 Front St., Toronto M5J 1E6; (416) 699-4666;
http://freenet.buffalo.edu/~startrek/toronto_trek.html.

Convention listings

Fan clubs and non-profit groups can have their conventions included in our listings FREE OF CHARGE.
Send us the details at least six months in advance and we'd be happy to include them in an upcoming issues of Parsec.
Send them to Convention listings — Parsec, Unit G Suite 108, 1942 Regent St., Sudbury, Ont. P3E 3Z9
or fax: (705) 523-5276

BRAIN TEASER

Later this fall, Columbia-TriStar is scheduled to release Screamers, a movie based on a Philip K. Dick short story. Perhaps the best known movie based on a Dick's work is 1982's Blade Runner. How well do you know the movie?

1) What year did Blade Runner take place?

2) Name the corporation that creates most of the replicants?

3) In Blade Runner what is the latest model of replicants?

4) What is the name of the technique used to detect replicants on Earth?

5) What is the name of the vehicle that police use?

6) Why were replicants created?

7) What happened to most of the world's animals?

8) Name the four renegade replicants:
   a) Roy, Zhora, Leon and Pris
   b) Roy, Cora, Leo and Pris
   c) Roy, Dora, Leonard and Pris
   d) Roy, Zhora, Leo and Pris

9) What is the name of Edward James Olmos's character?

10) What is the name of the oriental art he practices throughout the film?

11) What is Roy's last name?

12) What is the name of the blade runner killed at the beginning of the movie?

13) How does the Pris try to kill Decker?

14) What is Decker's first name?

15) Who runs the bar where Decker finds one of the replicants working as an exotic dancer?

16) What is the name of Decker's superior at police headquarters?

17) Why is Decker ordered to kill Rachel?

18) How does Roy kill his creator?

19) Who allows Roy to reach his creator?

20) What is this person's ailment?

ANSWERS:

1) 2020; (2) Tyrell Corporation; (3) Nexus 6; (4) the Voight-Kampff; (5) the Spinner; (6) slave labor on off-world colonies or for the military; (7) they became extinct; (8) a; (9) Gaff; (10) origami; (11) Batty; (12) Holden; (13) by sitting on his shoulders and breaking his neck; (14) Rick; (15) Taffy; (16) Captain Bryant; (17) because she is a replicant; (18) by crushing his head; (19) Sebastian; (20) Methuselah Syndrome

RATING:

1-5: Replicant.
5-10: The blade runner will have to ask you a few more questions.
11-15: OK you can have a replicant snake for a pet
16-20: You pass — you're human

UNKNOWN FORCES

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PICTURES: JOHN TKACHUK

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DECEMBER ISSUE

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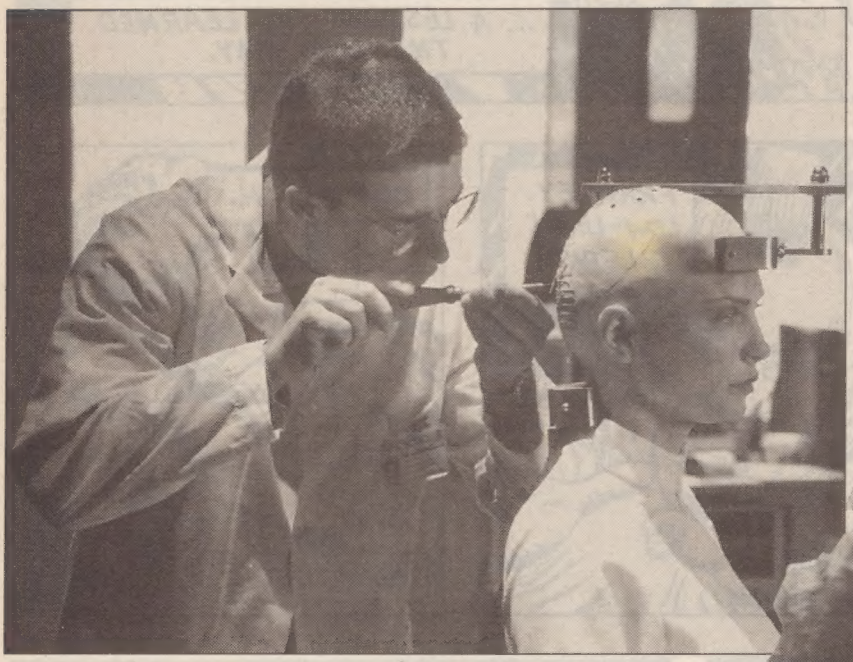

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